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# PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

#1

#5

**OUR ANNUAL WOMEN'S 100**  
WWE CLAIMS THE TOP 5 SPOTS!

#2



#3



#4



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# FROM the DESK OF...

**A**S I'M WRITING this column, the first signs of autumn are visiting themselves upon *PWI*'s office in the Philadelphia suburbs. There's a noticeable chill in the air, and the leaves are beginning to fall. I swear spring was just here! And yet, here we are with another change.

Speaking of changes, I have a pair of announcements that should be exciting for our longtime readers. The first is something you may have already heard about. Beginning with our December 2020 issue, we have switched over from a bimonthly release schedule to nine issues per year. That means you'll see *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* in your mailbox—or on your local magazine racks—more often (roughly every six weeks). It also means we'll be plenty busy producing those extra three issues. But, given all the exciting things happening in the world of wrestling, I personally could not be more excited for this change.

Even in the era of social distancing, there is so much professional wrestling to cover that we could never fit it all in a single issue. These three extra issues will afford us the opportunity to increase our coverage of promotions both big and small around the globe.

The second announcement has to do with our much talked-about annual rankings, the *PWI* "500" and "Women's 100" lists. For more than a decade, we've been following up our "500" issue with our yearly tally of the top women in the sport. Now, given our more ambitious production schedule, we're going to complete the hat trick. The February 2021 issue of *PWI* will include our first-ever "Tag Team 50."

It's no secret that the *PWI* "500" and "Women's 100" lists prioritize singles competition over tag matches. In light of all the fantastic tandems currently on the scene, we thought it was time to recognize them with a special list using its own unique criteria. And, unlike our existing lists, this will in no way be segregated by gender. Female tag teams from WWE, AEW, and elsewhere will be considered alongside their male counterparts. And, as for the new criteria? We'll reveal that in our next issue.

I'd like to give credit to *PWI* Senior Writer Al Castle, who not only came up with the idea for the "Tag Team 50," but also convinced the skeptics on our staff—yours truly included—that this was something we must do.

In celebration of the premiere edition of the "Tag Team 50," we'll be devoting our next issue to tag team wrestling. We'll have features and columns dedicated to this particular area of the sport that is too often not given the ink it deserves.

*Whew!* Now that I've gotten fully ahead of myself regarding the *next* issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, let me just focus for a moment on what you'll see in this one. In addition to our usual bounty of columns and features, you'll find our very first "Women's 100" without former Senior Writer Dan Murphy at the helm. To give you an idea of the responsibility Dan took on every year, I'll just say that I needed to call in the big guns. To compile the list, Al Castle and I were joined by new Contributing Writers Andrea Hangst (Sportskeeda), Kristen Ashly (Bell to Belles), and Pat Laprade (with Murphy, co-author of *Sisterhood of the Squared Circle*). The result is an ambitious, detailed ranking featuring 100 of the very best wrestlers in the world today. I hope you enjoy the work we put into it—and, as always, we welcome your feedback.

Finally, on page 66, take note of the ballot for our annual Achievement Awards, which will be included in our April issue, on newsstands February 2. Don't forget to cast your votes by the December 8 deadline!

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Editor-in-Chief

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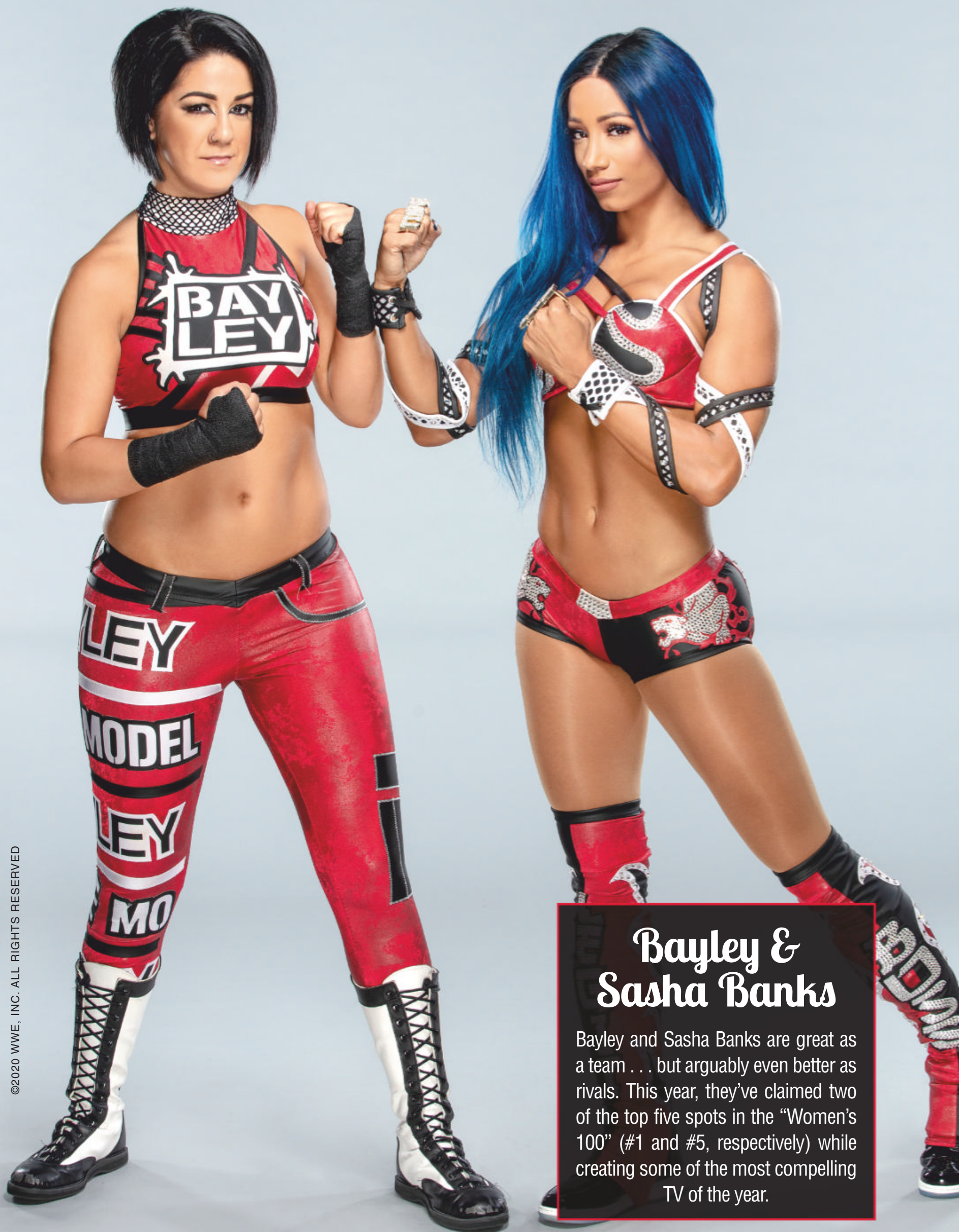
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## Bayley & Sasha Banks

Bayley and Sasha Banks are great as a team . . . but arguably even better as rivals. This year, they've claimed two of the top five spots in the "Women's 100" (#1 and #5, respectively) while creating some of the most compelling TV of the year.



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# BEFORE the BELL

COMPILED BY MIKE BESSLER

## ORANGE CRUSH

**T**he question of what exactly constitutes “art” is undoubtedly one of the great sociopolitical conundrums of the modern era. While the most common forms of expression—from theater to canvas and from concert to screen—remain the subjects of spirited debate and robust discussion regarding their respective roles in the *zeitgeist*, professional wrestling still draws a proverbial short straw in the search for mainstream recognition as a legitimate art form. After all, Jean-Michel Basquiat didn’t paint headlocks, and Gustav Mahler didn’t compose Symphony No. 6 from inside a steel cage (we think). Fortunately, aficionados and connoisseurs of every stripe can finally move on to pondering other topics of merit, as editor Adam Abdalla and a talented bullpen of contributors have effectively reconciled the worlds of professional wrestling and fine art through a new print endeavor entitled *Orange Crush: The Journal of Art and Wrestling*.

At first blush, *Orange Crush* is decidedly different from any other wrestling mag to ever hit the stands. An oversized volume printed on heavy paper with matte finish, its look and feel are more in step with the likes of *Architectural Digest*, *The New Yorker*, or any number of prestigious literary magazines. Lifting the veil on longstanding barriers of tribalism and tradition, *Orange Crush* reveals the people of pro wrestling in all their glorious diversity, providing readers with an unblinking view of wrestlers as complex human beings.

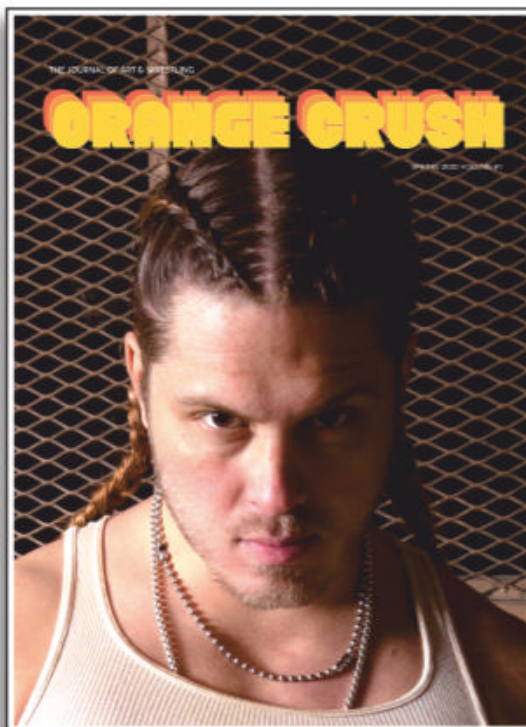
Indie darling-turned-AEW standout Joey Janela graces the cover of this inaugural issue and is the subject of a cover story in which he reflects on life as a risk-taking fan favorite, yielding a collage of real talk complemented by an evocative spread of

photos by Lyndsy Welgos. Eric Shorey’s “Wrestling Beyond Gender” explores gender identity and sexuality beyond the once-narrow parameters of institutionalized thinking, affording special attention to performers such as Effy and Sonny Kiss. And, in one of the journal’s most offbeat selections, Nick Demko-Pavese offers his take on Joey Janela’s Spring Break, employing a stream-of-consciousness, mixed-media presentation of his extensive ruminations. Photojournalism also assumes a prominent role in the fabric of *Orange*

*Crush*, as evidenced by the work of Aaron Hardin in Dan Duray’s piece “World of W.O.M.B.A.T.” and via a compilation of work from veteran lucha libre photographer Avery Danziger.

It’s important to note that *Orange Crush* unabashedly caters less to casual wrestling fans and more to the “art crowd.” The cover price of \$25 is an early clue that this periodical isn’t likely to be found on your average newspaper kiosk or gas station spin rack. Moreover, the language, themes, and visual elements therein are often provocative and unrestrained, and therefore recommended solely for the eyes of mature readers.

Where professional wrestling typifies the art of storytelling, *Orange Crush* presents the stagecraft of storytelling as pure art. The journal is a must-see for the curious enthusiast and a must-have for the serious collector. We give it four-and-a-half out of five suplexes.





# TALKIN' TRASH

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related items you've been talking about lately and our gut reaction to each:

## 10. Orange Cassidy defeats Chris Jericho in the first-ever Mimosa Mayhem match.

In the wake of an overwhelmingly favorable fan response, Jericho has already booked an entire card of similarly themed matches, including a Mai Tai Melee, a Tom Collins Tussle, and the much-anticipated Fuzzy Navel Foofaraw.

## 9. WWE orders talent to refrain from using their ring names in appearances and endeavors on third party platforms.

In an ostensibly related story, newly created Twitch streams for "Quadruple H" and "Sasha Savings and Loan" have already garnered millions of followers.

## 8. WWE releases 36-year employee and Hall of Famer Gerald Brisco.

WWE Chairman and CEO Vince McMahon was unavailable for comment, as he was busy polishing his collection of vintage, solid gold toilet seats.

## 7. Ring of Honor's Flip Gordon spreads COVID-19 skepticism and misinformation via Twitter.

Pressed by the Twittersverse to reveal the medical credentials which have shaped his opinions, Flip shared the label from a half-empty bottle of children's cough syrup, a video clip of Dr. Nick from *The Simpsons*, and a well-read copy of the book *Everyone Poops* by Taro Gomi.

## 6. Thunder Rosa appears at AEW's All Out, challenging Hikaru Shida for the women's strap.

Rosa publicly thanked her NWA boss Billy Corgan for giving her the opportunity to compete in AEW but added that the gesture still doesn't make up for his lackluster work on the latest Smashing Pumpkins single, "Cyr."

## 5. Brock Lesnar becomes a free agent after his WWE contract expires.

In anticipation of an impending bidding war, Juggalo Championship Wrestling extended its most generous contract offer in history, enticing "The Beast Incarnate" with a 12-pack of Faygo Moon Mist and a pair of designer jorts.

## 4. AJ Styles publicly states that his time with WWE is winding down.

After wrapping up with the 'E, Styles plans fulfill his lifelong dream of traveling the world from edge to edge.

## 3. Dominik Mysterio defeats Buddy Murphy in a street fight.

As per the special stipulation in the match, Dominik was promptly awarded custody of Murphy's pet ferret, Papi.

## 2. The Rock becomes co-owner of the XFL.

In light of The Rock's time-tested reputation as a consistent top box-office draw, film execs have already greenlighted a film adaptation of the XFL's 2021 season, tentatively entitled *Escape from Rockball Mountain* and co-starring Kevin Hart.

## 1. Former WWE star Batista appears in the new Dune trailer.

Although *Dune* fans and wrestling enthusiasts may not agree on "Big Dave's" merits as an actor, the one thing they probably do agree on is that it would be good to see one more appearance by Sting.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

# WE HEARD THAT!

"They're putting their lives on the line, or their health on the line, their family life on the line, all the time. They made Vince a billionaire, and then the fact that he's still being so heavy-handed about their ability to make a simple buck on Cameo just struck me as so absurd, and ridiculous, and wrong."

— **Former presidential candidate ANDREW YANG, to Chris Van Vliet on WWE's move to ban talent from third-party platforms**

"Maybe I've proven myself to him as someone he can trust to get something done. We have a good bond. Having gone through what he has in building

NXT and the brand, hopefully, I won't let him down by continuing to build the brand and perform at the highest level."

— **FINN BALOR, discussing his relationship with Triple H, from an interview for TV Insider**

"Sometime down the line, one day, maybe me and Brodie can do like a Shield/Wyatt super team or something. Or maybe someone that will complement me, like a guy like PAC, or even a younger guy like Joey [Janela] or Darby [Allin], or something like that. I'll definitely be open to the idea of it."

— **JON MOXLEY on Busted Open Radio, musing about the possibility of building a new faction in AEW**



## ONE TO WATCH: CARA NOIR

**H**e's won major tournaments, captured top titles, and made his first PWI "500" appearance at #72. Thanks to his intriguing persona and remarkable charisma, Cara Noir is the single most buzzworthy wrestler on the U.K. independent scene. And yet, outside of Europe, he hasn't caught on as a big name. Expect that to change ... and soon.

Once an aspiring ballet performer, Cara Noir's hopes for a storied career as an accomplished *ballerino* were dashed when he was dismissed from the Royal Ballet School due to "anger management issues." At 17, he found a new outlet for creativity and competition through combat sports, gaining a black belt in Renshinkai Karate. He went on learn Muay Thai, No-Gi Jiu-Jitsu, Aikido, and other martial arts, amassing a veritable arsenal of fighting styles by the time of his initial foray into pro wrestling at the age of 23.

In his first apprenticeship as a wrestler, Noir competed throughout the U.K. against Danny Boy Collins, Johnny Kidd, Karl Kramer, and many others. From 2013 to 2015, he trained with the Knight family at their facility in Norwich.

"Wrestling with the likes of Klondyke Kate, Doug Williams, Johnny Storm, Jody Fleisch, and Julia and Roy Knight allowed me to build my knowledge and confidence," Noir said of his early career. "And taught me the importance of well-placed, hard-hitting strikes and drilled me in complex set-piece sequences full of creative detail."

Retaining vestiges of his youthful dreams, Cara Noir dazzles fans with an uncanny ring entrance inspired by the pageantry of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. From behind the curtain, Cara emerges as a vision of the fabled Black Swan, festooned in an ornate cape and breathtaking theatrical makeup. It's a calculated display by Cara, who believes his presentation catches his foes off-guard.

"It's definitely a psychological advantage," he said. "Because it makes my opponents feel I've won before the bell has even rung."

Cara Noir's breakout moment came in 2019 when he faced PAC in a scintillating half-hour bout for Riptide Wrestling in Brighton, U.K. Although PAC got the win, Noir earned the respect of fans

who were captivated by his uncanny presence and compelling fortitude.

But the true moment of arrival came earlier this year, when the "Black Swan" defeated Ilja Dragunov, Kyle Fletcher, and Paul Robinson in a fatal four-way for the vacant PROGRESS Wrestling championship—claiming a prize that's been worn by WALTER, Pete Dunne, Will Ospreay, and others. Given PROGRESS' close relationship with WWE, the win bodes well for his future.

Noir also won the prestigious wXw 16 Carat Gold Tournament in March, beating Jeff Cobb and Eddie Kingston in early competition and defeating Mike Bailey in the final round. Although relentless in his pursuit of victory, he remains committed to incorporating the artistic vision that developed in his formative years into his future as an in-ring performer.

"My ultimate goal is to be known as the most creative wrestler in the world," he said.



PHOTO BY ROB BRAZIER



## BEHIND THE CURTAIN: *ETHAN PAGE*

**H**e's a star of Impact Wrestling and the North American independent scene. With Josh Alexander, he holds the record for longest reign with the Impact tag title. Now, 14 years into his career, wrestler and promoter Ethan Page has effectively harnessed the art of self-promotion to build upon his already-impressive resume. Combining his talent as a performer with tech-savvy business acumen, Page has effectively developed his in-ring persona into a personal brand.

Page credits his wife Viviana with the initial idea that led to his online ubiquity. An avid follower of online vlogs, Viviana encouraged her husband to get into the game, figuring that his charisma made him a natural for the medium.

In June 2019, Page began posting his own vlogs on YouTube, chronicling his exploits as a wrestler and his life outside the ring. The subsequent buzz that he generated earned him dedicated followers and eventually brought him to the attention of the folks behind Twitch. Earlier this year, he signed an exclusive streaming contract with the popular platform, where he plays video games, chats with other wrestlers, and even comments on Impact Wrestling footage for his thousands of viewers.

"I built a good audience and Twitch saw that," Page recalled, noting that his streams on that platform alone have already been seen by over 225,000 viewers.

In addition to his live Twitch streams, Page maintains his vlog channel on YouTube and posts new content every week. He's even received the blessings

of the brass at Impact Wrestling to provide candid, behind-the-scenes footage from events. Although his audiences have come to know him as a performer, Page brands his work by including his real name, Julian, in the titles of his productions.

"For me, the whole 'Played by Julian' thing is my way of protecting myself," he explained. "I felt like there was a point in my career where people were talking *for* me. I want people to know that I'm playing this character. If it's good, just know that Julian is the one who is doing this."

Page's streams and vlogs offer glimpses of life on the road, replete with real-life camaraderie and shenanigans. He also gives audiences a window on his life outside of wrestling by posting videos that spotlight his interests in gaming, toys, and food. Recently, he documented his journey to physical fitness during quarantine, showing subscribers how he built his impressive physique.

Page's endeavors are self-financed. And, although he went to school for television broadcasting, he feels he's learned more on his own than he ever did in the classroom. His creative toolbox includes a Canon G7x camera, a MacBook Pro, Final Cut 10, and Photoshop.

"I want everyone in wrestling to know my skillset," Page said. "I book for multiple companies, I promote events, I've done graphic design, video production, I've run seminars. If there's any job in wrestling, I know I can do it."

Links for all of Ethan Page's online platforms, including Twitch, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter can be found at his official website, [playedbyjulian.com](http://playedbyjulian.com). □



PHOTO BY @SHOOTINGTHEINDIES



# RINGSIDE

WITH HARRY BURKETT

**R**OAD WARRIOR ANIMAL, one-half of the most influential tag team of all-time, died of natural causes on September 22 at a resort in Osage Beach, Missouri. He was 60 years old.

Born **Joseph Laurinaitis** in Philadelphia on September 12, 1960, the future Hall of Famer grew up in Minnesota. His life changed at age 20 while he was working out in the gym. He had just finished his 10th rep of incline presses and racked the 315-pound barbell when a big hand slapped him across the chest. “So, you’re Laurinaitis, huh?” rasped a burly voice. “You’re sick in the head. Nobody should be able to do that many reps at your age.”

Laurinaitis’ eyes rested upon **Mike Hegstrand** for the first time. A friendship was born, and history was made.

In 1982, Laurinaitis debuted as “The Road Warrior” in Georgia, but Hegstrand soon joined him, and their names were changed to “Animal” and “Hawk.” Managed by “**Precious**” **Paul Ellering**, **The Road Warriors** became the breakout stars on Ted Turner’s SuperStation WTBS.

Animal and Hawk reigned as National tag team champions on four occasions, and went on to headline in Memphis, the Mid-South, and the Pacific Northwest. They held the AWA World tag team title for over a year in 1984-85. *PWI* readers voted them Tag Team of the Year an unprecedented four times, in 1983, 1984, 1985, and 1988.

The Road Warriors reached their zenith in Jim Crockett Promotions, where they held the NWA World tag team title in 1988-89. They permeated the

American culture and became mainstream celebrities during their tours of Japan. The Legion of Doom finally conquered the WWF by defeating **The Nasty Boys** for the World tag team belts at SummerSlam ’91, thereby becoming the only duo to win world tag titles in the WWF, NWA, and AWA.

While Hawk’s personal demons and Animal’s forced hiatus due to a back injury derailed the “Roadies” in the mid-1990s, they made comebacks in the WWF in the late-’90s and early-2000s. Their remarkable journey ended with Hegstrand’s sudden death in 2003.

“I think Hawk and I could’ve lasted as a full-time team well into 2005 or 2006,” Animal told me in 2011. “Look at Hogan and Flair. They’ve kept going even though they’re hitting 60! But we didn’t need to keep going. We’ll go down as the greatest tag team of all-time. Nobody can take that away from us.”

Animal’s death was a huge, unexpected blow to the wrestling world. But we march on ...

AEW is succeeding by all ratings metrics as its flagship program, *Dynamite*, approaches its one-year mark. The NHL playoffs on USA and the NBA playoffs on TNT conspired to interrupt the Wednesday Night War, as the time slots for *NXT* and *Dynamite* were jumbled throughout September and the rival programs did not go head to head. Without competition from *NXT*, *Dynamite* reached one million viewers on September 9, just as it did during its October 2019 premiere.

But not all has gone smoothly. AEW President and CEO **Tony Khan** was criticized for the handling of an incident during a “Broken Rules” match at All Out. Both **Matt Hardy** and opponent **Sammy Guevara** fell against a table, and Hardy hit his head on the concrete floor. Hardy lay



Road Warriors Animal and Hawk (pictured here with manager Paul Ellering) left behind a legacy that will never be matched, with world tag title reigns in the AWA, NWA, and WWF.





Paul Heyman has a word with Samu, one-half of The Samoan SWAT Team (with Rikishi Fatu). Heyman's history with the Anoa'i-Fatu family adds another dimension to his current dealings with Roman Reigns.

unresponsive afterward and was very groggy getting to his feet. AEW's physician, **Dr. Michael Sampson**, went through standard protocols and proclaimed Hardy fit to continue.

It became clear that Hardy shouldn't have been allowed to continue the match, and, to compound the controversy, Khan insisted Hardy hadn't suffered a concussion. Matt's wife, **Reby Hardy**, posted a contradictory statement: "He's still in the hospital. 1000% concussion. Anyone with eyes could have told you that, though."

**Roman Reigns**, alongside new special counsel **Paul Heyman**, is spearheading a resurgence of the Smackdown brand, which started one week after SummerSlam at the critically acclaimed Payback pay-per-view, in which a newly heel Reigns dethroned "**The Fiend**" **Bray Wyatt** for the WWE Universal title in a three-way match that also involved former champ **Braun Strowman**. Reigns entered the match late, after Wyatt and Strowman had worn

each other down, but that hasn't diminished his momentum.

During the first few weeks of Reigns' return, which coincided with WWE's new ThunderDome set at Orlando's Amway Center, *Smackdown* surged to 2.2 million viewers, an increase of 200,000 to 300,000 viewers.

Reigns' cool-heel persona, as well as his alliance with Heyman, is absolutely believable, considering his championship frustrations and his damned-if-he-does, damned-if-he-doesn't relationship with the WWE fanbase. How this affects his family ties with his cousins, The Usos, will continue to make for intriguing viewing.

*Raw*'s viewer numbers have also surged since the introduction of the ThunderDome set, surpassing the two-million mark as well.

Speaking of *Raw*, **Mickie James**' recent bout against **Asuka** ended abruptly after the Women's champion hit James with a kneelift so wicked that the referee thought James might have suffered a concussion. That turned out not to be the case, but James understood the call.

"What we do as a sport is very dangerous," James told the U.K. website TalkSport. "So, if somebody gets a concussion, not only can they not wrestle the rest of that match, but they could possibly never wrestle again depending on how bad it is, same with football.

"So, we have to be careful with that and I get it. It was unfortunate for me . . . but I'm fine. My nose hurts a little bit from that kneelift, I'll be honest."

**Karrion Kross** couldn't even savor the greatest win of his career (for the NXT championship) after NXT TakeOver 30. Defending champion **Keith Lee** had leveled Kross with a devastating clothesline, separating Kross' shoulder in the process. A gutsy Kross still survived Lee's Spirit Bomb and gritted through the pain to execute

Asuka's kneelift to Mickie James looked so devastating that the assigned referee called off the match—believing James to be legitimately injured.



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**Rocky Romero shakes hands with David Finlay during the first round of ROH's Pure championship tournament. Finlay defeated Romero to advance to the quarterfinals.**

a Doomsday Saito suplex to claim the gold.

Days later, Kross was forced to relinquish the title. **Finn Balor** won the vacant championship from **Adam Cole** at the "Super Tuesday II" edition of *NXT* on September 9. Balor, who enjoyed a 292-day *NXT* title reign in 2015-16, kept pace with Cole deep into the match and effectively countered his trademark maneuvers, including the Panama Sunrise. The Irishman executed an inverted 1916 and, moments later, came off the top rope with another 1916, putting Cole down for the pinfall at the 23-minute mark.

In the meantime, former champ Lee moved on to the Raw brand, where he scored a crucial early win over **Randy Orton** at Payback.

Just as I thought we were going to see "The Best Of The **Beer City Bruiser**" on the next episode of *Ring Of Honor Wrestling*, ROH made a gem of an announcement, particularly for diehard fans: A tournament to determine

a new Pure champion would air on its weekly TV show.

The original Pure championship debuted in 2004 when **AJ Styles** defeated **CM Punk** in a tournament final. Other titleholders included **Doug Williams**, **John Walters**, **Samoa Joe**, **Bryan Danielson** (**Daniel Bryan**), and a 19-year-old **Jay Lethal**.

Three special rules come into play during Pure title matches: 1.) Each wrestler has only three rope-breaks to stop submission holds and pinfalls. 2.) No closed-fist punches to the face are allowed; the first infraction results in a warning, the second results in a disqualification. 3.) The title can change hands on a disqualification or countout.

Jay Lethal and **Jonathan Gresham** have advanced in the ongoing tournament as of press time. Other participants include **David Finlay**, **Silas Young**, **Josh Woods**, **Tracy Williams**, **Delirious**, **Kenny King**, and **PJ Black**.

Now, should they still shake hands or just bump elbows?

This 'n' that: **Damian Priest** has looked impressive since winning the *NXT* North American belt at TakeOver 30, particularly in his successful defense against **Timothy Thatcher** ... Ex-NFL kicker **Pat McAfee** proved to be a natural in his wrestling debut—both in terms of in-ring performance and his annoying heel persona—against Adam Cole at the same event. McAfee is now claiming to be "an undefeated professional wrestler except for one match" ... Former world champion **Booker T** survived a bout with COVID-19 ... **Renee Young**, who made history as the industry's first full-time female color commentator, still hasn't

indicated whether she plans to join her husband, World champion **Jon Moxley**, in AEW.

The passing of former Ring of Honor champion **Xavier** stunned the industry on August 16. While Xavier's family isn't releasing the cause of death at this time, the 42-year-old was said to be considering an in-ring comeback before the COVID pandemic derailed those plans.

Xavier was very active throughout the Northeast independent circuit, and his career highlight indeed occurred in Ring of Honor, where he beat **Low-Ki** for the promotion's top singles title on September 21, 2002, thanks to interference from **Christopher Daniels** and his **Prophecy** faction. The Prophecy was instrumental in helping Xavier retain the title against **Jay Briscoe**, **AJ Styles**, and **Paul London**, among others. Samoa Joe ended his reign on March 22, 2003.

**James Harris**, best known as **Kamala**, died on August 9 of complications from COVID-19 at age 70. Harris had struggled with diabetes for nearly 30 years, with both of his legs amputated below the knee almost a decade ago.

Much like his rival, **Andre The Giant**, Harris spent his career as a global attraction and headlining nearly every U.S. promotion, but, sadly, had little to show for it near the end of his life. Discovered by **Bobo Brazil** and appearing as "Sugar Bear" Harris in his early years, he was repackaged as "Kamala the Ugandan Giant" by **Jerry Lawler** and **Jerry Jarrett** in 1982, and did tremendous business with Lawler at Memphis' Mid-South Coliseum.

From there, Kamala became a staple of **Gen. Skandor Akbar's** Devastation Inc. in the Mid-South and Texas. He enjoyed four stints in WWE, challenging World champion **Hulk Hogan** in 1984 and again in 1986-87, feuding with **The Undertaker** in 1992, and making some comedy





Xavier (seen here with a waistlock on AJ Styles) was a standout of the early-2000s indie scene: a former heavyweight champ for ROH, ECWA, and Northeast Wrestling. He passed away in August at age 42.

appearances in the mid-2000s. He will forever be an iconic figure in pro wrestling.

**“Bullet” Bob Armstrong**, father of **Scott, Brad, Steve, and Brian Armstrong (B.G. James)**, lost his bout with bone cancer on August 27. He was 80 years old. Armstrong wrestled throughout the 1960s in addition to serving in the U.S. Marine Corps and working for the Fair Oaks (Georgia) Fire Department. In 1970, “The Fighting Fireman From Marietta” finally gave up the hook and ladder to focus solely on his wrestling career.

Armstrong got noticed on a national level when he challenged NWA World champion **Jack Brisco** on October 9, 1974, in Miami Beach, Florida. He was enormously popular throughout the Southeast, particularly in the Florida panhandle and Alabama, where he and his sons were the **Von Erichs** of Continental Championship Wrestling, perennially feuding

with **Ron Fuller, Robert Fuller**, and their Stud Stable.

The veteran suffered a terrible accident in 1984, when his weight bench broke while he was pressing a 180-pound dumbbell, and the dumbbell fell on his face, requiring a reattachment of his nose and other severe facial injuries. That was parlayed into a memorable angle in Georgia, where **Ted DiBiase** used his loaded glove to “break” Armstrong’s face. Armstrong returned to CCW, where he became the masked “Bullet” to hide his disfigured face.

Incredibly, Armstrong’s final match took place in 2019, when he defeated **The Assassin** in Dothan, Alabama.

Other recent deaths include **Jerry Brown, Buddy Roberts’** partner in the original **Hollywood Blonds**; **Beckie Mullen**, who appeared as **Sally the Farmer’s Daughter** in GLOW; and **Steve Lee**, who wrestled as **Puppet The Psycho Dwarf**.

That’s all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### REMEMBERING ANIMAL

During our long interview nearly a decade ago, Joe Laurinaitis beamed with pride as he talked about his family: his wife Julia, a bodybuilder; his eldest son, Joe Jr., who served in Iraq while in the U.S. Army; his son, James, who went on to become an NFL linebacker; and his daughter, Jessica, who was excelling in hockey while in high school at the time. His brother, John, was a WWE executive and accomplished wrestler in his own right.

### A RICH BACKSTORY

WWE should acknowledge the history between the Anoa’i/Fatu family and Paul Heyman, which would add deeper meaning to Heyman’s work with Roman Reigns. Heyman managed The Samoan SWAT Team, comprised of Fatu (father of The Usos) and Samu (son of Afa Anoa’i Sr.). Considering that relationship, perhaps Heyman genuinely respects the “Tribal Chief.”

### WATCH OUT FOR THOSE TENTACLES!

Jonathan Gresham somehow kept his cool against the dynamic Wheeler Yuta in ROH’s Pure title tourney. Then again, Gresham’s newfound aggression is calculated—not the result of a bad temper. Gresham and Jay Lethal remind me of Jack and Jerry Brisco, circa 1983. Like Jerry Brisco, Gresham has manipulated his partner, the more accomplished star, into breaking the rules for short-term gain. Be careful, Jay.

### ATLANTA’S NIGHT OF BLOODY TERROR

That was the headline in the November 1973 issue of *Ben Strong Wrestling*, featuring Bob Armstrong in a pool of blood. First, Bobby Duncum attacked Armstrong in a parking lot, and then fled to Japan to avoid his wrath. Armstrong suckered Duncum into a bout upon his return, and then Duncum carved up Bob’s forehead with a pencil and nails sticking out of a wooden chair. “The Bullet” was one tough son-of-a-gun!



# QUICK COUNT

BY AL CASTLE

**A**LTHOUGH I GREW up in the '80s, the ultimate figure of executive authority from my childhood was not Ronald Reagan. It was World Wrestling Federation figurehead, "President" Jack Tunney. If I heard the words "after much deliberation" come out of Tunney's mouth, I knew something downright cataclysmic was about to happen.

It was never clear to me how Tunney became the WWF's commander-in-chief, but the path to that *other* presidency has been documented on the big screen many a time. As we prepare to turn the page on another presidential election, here's my homage to some of Hollywood's best films depicting

the road to the White House. It's a shame the Canadian-born Tunney was never eligible to reside in it.

## WAG THE DOG

It finally happened. WWE made its "Big Dog" into its big heel.

It took a global pandemic, and TV ratings sinking to all-time lows, for WWE to hit the ultimate panic button—the one they refused to hit on former top "baby-faces" like Hulk Hogan or John Cena for all those years.

But the truth is, Reigns never was Hogan or Cena—not just from a box office standpoint, but as a natural fit in the role of the baby-kissing, flag-waving good guy. Even when he wasn't trying to do so, Reigns always displayed the kind of smug

attitude that lent itself more to the part of a big-headed bully.

And so it's no surprise that Reigns' turn was greeted by many fans, not with shock and disbelief, but with a collective, "It's about time." As a wrestling villain, Reigns is straight out of central casting.

Now, if only WWE could cast the hero to dethrone him.

## PRIMARY COLORS

WWE took another bold move late in the summer to brighten up its TV product—quite literally.

The introduction of the ThunderDome—with its hundreds of LED screens populating Orlando's Amway Center with a crowd of virtual fans—added a much-needed splash of color to WWE's pandemic-era TV product.

But at what point does "exciting" cross the line into "distracting"? WWE might figure that a digital crowd makes for a better background than no crowd at all. But, when trying to pay attention to what's going on in the ring, the last thing some fans want to see is an electronic collage of creepy, smiling heads.

They get enough of that these days on Zoom meetings.

WWE has presented its new Thunder Dome concept as revolutionary, but Al Castle feels it may be more trouble than it's worth. Even when fans are acting completely normal—never a given—the sight of all those faces can be pretty distracting.



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Ring of Honor's Pure Tournament is proceeding with precautionary measures taken—including an absence of fans and minimal personnel. Here, Wheeler Yuta briefly has the better of Jonathan Gresham (who would ultimately defeat him).

## IDIOCRACY

If the mere visual of hundreds of virtual fans occupying LED screens in the ThunderDome isn't unnerving enough, some dummies have made things much, much worse.

Just days into the ThunderDome experiment, WWE was in damage control mode after some remote participants displayed such disturbing images as a smiling Chris Benoit, a Ku Klux Klan rally, and what appeared to be an image of a beheading.

In a statement, WWE blasted this “abhorrent behavior” and said it would ban the culprits from future live events.

While some ThunderDome attendees clearly took advantage, WWE should have anticipated people jumping at the rare opportunity to get television time and using it to disrupt the company's TV product.

Isn't that, pretty much, the whole Retribution angle in a nutshell?

## LONG SHOT

It's not often that every participant in a tournament can be considered an underdog, but that's the case with Ring of Honor's Pure Title tourney.

Of course, there are some betting favorites to become the latest

holder of ROH's reincarnated “Pure” championship, including company mainstays like Jay Lethal and Jonathan Gresham. But here's the bigger picture: Who could have thought just a few months ago that one of the highest-profile wrestling promotions in the U.S. would build its relaunch around 16 wrestlers with only modest name value, and even more modest dimensions?

After going dark in March because of the pandemic, ROH re-opened in September with a focus on what first put it on the map 18 years ago—technical wrestling. It's a welcome change of pace for an industry that has gotten a little carried away in recent months with the “cinematic” match craze.

If I never see a wrestling match take place on top of a truck or in a dental office, it will be too soon.

## THE DEAD ZONE

Unfortunately, the excitement of what's going on in the ring during ROH's Pure tournament won't be matched by the excitement in the crowd—because there simply isn't one.

Like Impact Wrestling, ROH's pandemic-era TV product is hampered considerably by a

lack of fans in the stands. Where WWE and AEW have the resources to work around the problem—either through gimmicks like the ThunderDome or, in AEW's case, actually allowing some ticket-buying fans into the arena—there are fewer options available for smaller companies like ROH and Impact.

Working in confined settings, ROH and Impact have so far opted not to use wrestlers and trainees and stand-ins for fans, which is admirable from a safety standpoint. But they might at least consider using artificial crowd noise to liven up their shows.

Both ROH and Impact deserve some applause for putting on good shows as of late—even if it's of the canned variety.

## HEAD OF STATE

There may be another reason AEW and WWE have been able to do a lot more during the pandemic than other American wrestling companies: location.

It's true that both companies' decisions to operate largely out of Florida throughout the COVID-19 health crisis had a lot to do with the fact that both had important infrastructure set up in the state (for WWE, its Performance Center in Orlando; for AEW, the TIAA Bank Field sports complex used by the Jacksonville Jaguars, whose owners, the Khan family, also own AEW).

But it didn't hurt that Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has been all too willing to have his state host wrestling events, while other governors have shied away from live sporting events. Even in April, when Florida was still in a lockdown, DeSantis issued a decree designating pro wrestling an “essential” business.

Florida might have missed out on hosting WrestleMania, but it'll still host more wrestling than any other state in the union this year. □



# THE LOCKUP

BY BRIAN SOLOMON

**T**HEY SAY IF it ain't broke, don't fix it. If you've been watching *Raw* and *SmackDown* for the past several years, you might think that NXT is completely broken. As most fans know, it isn't. But WWE's approach to developing talent may be.

Late this summer, we got an unfortunate reminder of this phenomenon thanks to Keith Lee's abrupt jump from NXT to *Raw*. Lee, a trainee of the late "Killer" Tim Brooks who achieved unparalleled success on the black-and-gold brand, simultaneously holding the NXT and North American titles and capturing the hearts of fans in the process, has been pegged for great things for a while now. There's a reason he's usually described as "Limitless"—because that's the extent of his potential.

Yet his *Raw* debut the night after SummerSlam, in which he confronted Randy Orton on behalf of his friend and fellow NXT alumnus Drew McIntyre, had Lee's longtime supporters very concerned.

Viewers noted that several subtle (or not so subtle) changes had been made to his presentation, but they added up to a troubling whole. His ring gear had been altered to include a shirt that now covered his physique—attributed by many to Vince McMahon's well-known skepticism of bodies that aren't rippling with

muscle. His entrance theme—a favorite among fans—had been changed. His promo delivery seemed to be strangely stilted and overly rehearsed, clearly the result of coaching. In short, there was something totally "off," making him not quite the Keith Lee fans loved—the Keith Lee who had shown enough potential

to be called to *Raw* in the first place. Now, it's well worth noting that just a few days later, Lee dominated 18-year WWE main event veteran Randy Orton in a convincing victory at Payback, which would support the notion that WWE does indeed have big plans for him. But first impressions are important, and Lee's was bungled, giving him an obstacle to overcome that should've never been put in front of him to begin with.

The changes described above may seem trivial to fixate upon, but history has shown they can have a cumulative and disastrous effect. I was working for WWE at the time of Goldberg's much-awaited debut in the company back in 2003. The superstar phenom who had set the world on fire in WCW showed up on *Raw* the night after



**Keith Lee's August 24 *Raw* debut was a bumpy start for the gifted grappler. Brian Solomon laments WWE's decision to tinker with Lee's presentation, which worked so well for him in NXT.**

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**Hideo Itami (now NJPW star KENTA) is an undeniable talent, but he ultimately wound up underperforming on *205 Live*. More than a few other wrestlers have followed similar trajectories in WWE, only to thrive elsewhere.**

WrestleMania 19 and immediately called out The Rock—his WWE equivalent at the time in terms of popularity and cross-over appeal. Fans were pumped to see a confrontation for the ages, which was signed for the following month at Backlash. I was there at the Worcester Centrum to witness the proceedings from my usual spot in the hard camera section. But when Goldberg emerged from behind the curtain, the electricity of the crowd was summarily sucked out of the building upon hearing that Goldberg's entrance music—the driving, drum-pounding anthem that had contributed so much to his success—had been tossed in favor of a lame, somewhat similar composition by Jim Johnston, WWE's in-house composer. The powers that be simply couldn't resist the urge to tinker with a winning formula and put their own stamp on it. Just this one important change cast a shadow

on the match, and, in my opinion, got Goldberg off to a bad start in a WWE run that became a disappointing flop.

Details matter. And when WWE doesn't show the confidence in their own talent to allow them to stick with what got them to the dance, that lack of confidence rubs off on the fans, who suddenly start to see the big fish as a small fish once they're taken out of the small pond.

We've seen it happen many times before. Finn Balor was a dominant NXT champion and wowed fans with his "Demon" persona—clearly hailed as the next big thing. Balor fizzled on the main roster when he was portrayed as too small to hang with the big guys . . . and eventually wound up back in NXT. Bobby Roode was seen as a surefire hit, then wound up in a throwaway tag team with Chad Gable (who himself suffered the same NXT curse when his tag

team American Alpha, viewed as a modern-day answer to The Steiner Brothers, was badly mishandled, too). Does anyone even remember that The Ascension, the ultimate main roster also-rans, were once a very huge deal in NXT? Remember Adrian Neville, the man who gravity forgot? Well, so did everyone else, until he reinvented himself as the badass PAC in AEW. Before becoming a comedy act, Bo Dallas reigned for nine months as NXT champion. When Triple H procured the services of Japanese sensation KENTA, it made headlines all across the industry. But there was ultimately no follow-through, and plain old Hideo Itami had to return to New Japan as KENTA to regain his stature.

Even stars like Kevin Owens, Shinsuke Nakamura, and Asuka, who've experienced success on the "main roster" brands, had to endure clear demotions and never quite returned to their NXT prominence. To be sure, resounding exceptions do exist, like Roman Reigns, Seth Rollins, and, most recently, Drew McIntyre, but they are just that: exceptions. While it's true that NXT is now a standalone brand and no longer the purely developmental territory it once was, that should be all the more reason its top athletes should be able to transition smoothly, providing WWE with a reliable source of talent—the exact role once played by the territorial system the company crushed underfoot decades ago. By all rights, Keith Lee should have a stellar WWE career ahead of him. His NXT experience should be used to elevate that career, not hinder it. He, like many others before him, doesn't need fixing. He needs the support of a front office that believes in him.

Star wrestlers shouldn't have to go to AEW or Impact to achieve their true potential. But, if they have to, they will. □



# WIN, LOSE, or DRAW

BY HARRY BURKETT

**B**Y NOW YOU'VE read Editor-in-Chief Kevin McElvaney's announcement in his "From the Desk Of..." column and learned that *PWI* is expanding to nine issues per year. I'm hard-pressed to think of another magazine in any genre that has increased its frequency in the internet era. Thanks to a renewed appreciation on social media—and you, our loyal readers—*PWI* has gone from surviving to thriving.

Before the internet, magazines were the only wide-reaching forum where wrestling was analyzed and critiqued. And, before cable television, print was the only vehicle by which regional draws could become national stars. Why would a New Yorker get excited about Dusty Rhodes challenging "Superstar" Graham in Madison Square Garden? He had already read about the "American Dream's" exploits in Florida and around the world. Why was NWA champion Ric Flair facing WWF champion Bob Backlund at Atlanta's Omni such a big deal? Backlund's dominance of the Northeast had been extensively covered in the magazines.

Growing up in Maryland, I discovered *Inside Wrestling* at our local Safeway store in early-1983. We lived in WWF territory, but our TV picked up signals from Virginia's Hampton Roads area, so I also watched the Mid-Atlantic promotion. *Inside Wrestling* blew

my mind, as I learned about the AWA, World Class Championship Wrestling, the Mid-South, and several other territories.

The columns were outstanding. "The Magazine That Ripped The Lid Off Pro Wrestling" featured opinion columns by Peter King, Stu Saks, Craig Peters, Bill Apter, Dan Shocket, Matt Brock, and others. The writers revealed little nuggets about themselves in these columns, which you'd never find in the feature stories. I knew Stu Saks played softball, Craig Peters liked reggae, and that Bill Apter was bald... because Dan Shocket told us so.

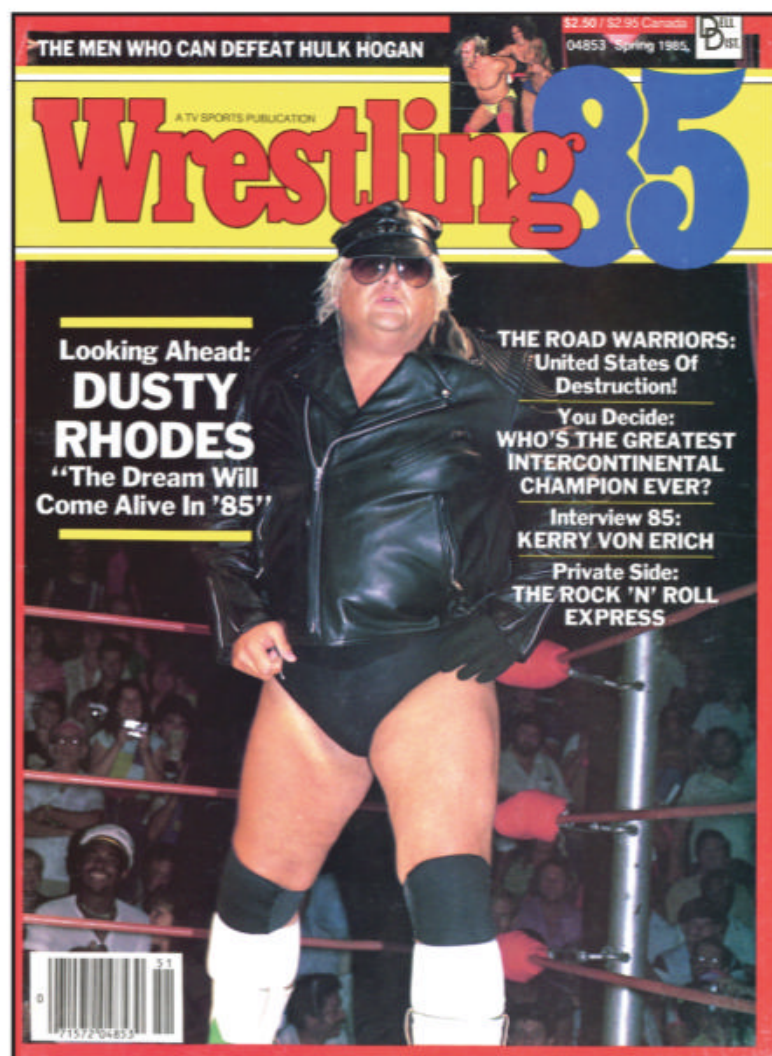
I read about the personal chemistry among the staff in the New York office and the mechanics of putting out several publications per month. I could almost hear the clacking of those Remington typewriters as the magazines developed their own mythology, most of it being true.

I was satisfied with reading only *Inside Wrestling*. After all, lawnmowing gigs

were seasonal and I still had to buy *Cracked* magazine each month. It was nearly a year before I spied the March 1984 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* in a convenience store. Magnificent! That "Year In Review" issue sported a sinister cover featuring The Road Warriors and an incredible full-color pinup of Hulk Hogan with Jimmy Snuka (both shot by Bill Apter).

After that, I bought every magazine I saw. The first copy of *The Wrestler* I purchased was the June 1984 issue, featuring the late David Von Erich on the cover. Although ring announcer Joe McHugh had told the crowd about Von Erich's passing on *WWF Championship Wrestling*, I needed *The Wrestler* to give me details about his death and the wrestling world's reaction.

So, were the magazines actually different from each other? While *Inside Wrestling* was



For Harry Burkett, the quarterly publications dubbed *Wrestling 83, 84, 85, and 86* were the crowning achievement in 1980s grappling mags. They featured color photos and slick paper throughout, with the best wrestling analysis around.





chock-full of opinion columns, *The Wrestler* stuck with standard departments such as Bill Apter's "What's Happening" news round-up, "Correspondents Reports," and "X-Ray," where six retired wrestlers would analyze a current star. I enjoyed it when Gene Kiniski blasted Buddy Rogers for being a hypocrite, criticizing rule-breakers when he spent his entire career as one. I suppose the editors were putting words in Rogers' mouth anyway.

Stanley Weston created what would evolve into London Publishing (and eventually Kappa Publishing), launching *Boxing Illustrated-Wrestling News* in 1958, with *Wrestling Illustrated* and *Wrestling Revue* carrying the line into the 1960s. *The Wrestler* came into existence in 1966, and *Inside Wrestling* came along two years later. In the early-1980s at least, they went on sale on the first Tuesday of each month while *PWI*, created in 1979, hit newsstands on the fourth Tuesday of each month. *Sports Review Wrestling*, which featured an epic-length apartment wrestling story (often written by Dan Shocket) with pictures of bikini-clad women grappling among armchairs and coffee tables in front of wealthy patrons, was treated like the black-sheep sibling, going on sale mid-month without much promotion.

of lesser quality. The cover photo of the October 1981 issue—with Tommy Rich clamping a sleeperhold on a bloody Harley Race—was actually out of focus, and Kamala appeared on the March 1987 issue with Hogan's head on a spear! Enough said.

That was in contrast to the finest magazine of the era: *Wrestling 83*, which went on to be known as *Wrestling 84*, *Wrestling 85*, etc. This was the first in the family of magazines to be all slick paper with lots of full color. While *PWI* was slightly less "tabloid" than *Inside* and *Wrestler*, the physical quality of *Wrestling 83* was every bit as good as *Sports Illustrated*. The features were longer with more depth and accompanying sidebars. The Saks-Peters influence was evident.

*Wrestling 83* was a quarterly, and there were several of those, most notably *Wrestling Superstars*. That magazine followed a tradition of quarterly magazines that started in the 1970s, such as *Wrestling Yearbook*, *Wrestling Annual*, and *Sports Review Wrestling Annual*. *Wrestling Superstars*, in particular, often boasted unconventional, more flamboyant covers, with a mix of features and long, themed sections. In the 1980s, *PWI Annual* and *Wrestler Annual* served as "best of" quarterlies for their namesake

publications. I've always wondered why all these "yearbooks" and "annuals" came out four times per year. *Victory Sports Wrestling* and *Wrestling USA* highlighted the best stories from all the magazines each quarter. Kappa Publishing launched the 104-page *Wrestle America* in 1992, soon after acquiring *PWI* and relocating most of its staff to Ambler, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia. *Wrestle America* featured a "magazine within a magazine." The extra "magazine" was always a special section with its own distinct *Wrestle America* cover. Notable themes included a 30-year history of the WWF title and an annual "Guide To The Independents." First released on a monthly basis, it was later reduced to a quarterly, but *Wrestle America* was a strong magazine in its day.

Another personal 1990s favorite was *The Wrestling Analyst*, a full-color bimonthly magazine that broke down the in-ring abilities of six wrestlers, in addition to dissecting the major promotions and pay-per-views at the time. Why a personal favorite? I edited the premiere issue, and went on to write the ensuing 14 issues from cover to cover.

I must mention a few non-London/Kappa magazines that were highly influential, including all of George Napolitano's titles, particularly *Wrestling's Main Event*, the sport's first all-slick paper mag with lots of color pages; *Wrestling World*, which ran for 35 years and favored rich, biographical features over sensational headlines; *WWF Magazine*, which spotlighted the federation's top superstars and storylines and included lavish photos; and *WOW Magazine*, which created the competition that forced *PWI* to emerge from its kayfabe closet.

Honestly, we could do a column on classic magazines every issue. And while *PWI* may stand alone now, I'm glad we remain a vibrant part of the wrestling media—now, even more so. □



# HOTSEAT

AN INCISIVE INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF THE SPORT'S TOP STARS



**BAYLEY**

**T**HE BAYLEY WE all knew a couple years ago would have surely celebrated topping the **PWI** “Women’s 100” with a round of hugs for everyone in the WWE women’s locker room. These days, you’re far more likely to find the WWE’s self-professed “Role Model” extending her arms to pat herself on the back—or to clobber an opponent with her title belt.

Even more than a year after turning her back on her legion of admirers, it’s still hard for many fans to agree with Bayley’s methods. But what they can’t disagree with is the results they’ve reaped: the longest reign as Smackdown Women’s champion in history; multiple successful title defenses (including against four opponents at WrestleMania); a second reign with the Women’s tag team championship; the most compelling WWE storyline of 2020; and, now, being chosen by **Pro Wrestling Illustrated** staff as the best female wrestler in the world.

Bayley’s career resurgence came after many fans and observers began to doubt whether the California native would ever fulfill the potential that was on display during her time in WWE’s developmental system, NXT. There, she and Sasha Banks helped put the black-and-yellow brand on the map with a memorable rivalry that earned them the 2015 **PWI** Match of the Year.

It took a reunion—and a subsequent falling out—with Banks, and the challenges of performing in the pandemic era, to help Bayley finally find her voice in WWE. And, as she explained to **PWI** Senior Writer Al Castle in this interview, that voice turned out to be an obnoxious one.





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**The socially distant era presented Bayley with new challenges, but also enabled her to find the voice she had been sorely lacking. Alongside Sasha Banks, the Smackdown Women's champ thrived.**

**Castle:** First of all, congratulations on being our #1 ranked wrestler in the 2020 *PWI* "Women's 100." I'll ask you what I asked Jon Moxley a few weeks ago when I interviewed him about being the #1 wrestler in the *PWI* "500": Did we get this right?

**Bayley:** Hell yeah.

**Castle:** How so?

**Bayley:** It's obvious that I made a major change late last year. And everybody kind of thought it was going to fail. They thought that I made the wrong decision, or that I couldn't pull it off. And I think I've proved everyone wrong, especially in the craziness that has been going on with the pandemic and not performing in front of fans, which makes everything way harder. But I've still been able to pull it off. And I think I used it to my advantage.

**Castle:** There was a lot of doubt and second-guessing over whether you were fit to play this role. I think part of it was kind of a compliment, in that you were such a great babyface that people just couldn't believe you fit into this role. Did that kind of fuel you to do well in this role?

**Bayley:** Yeah, for sure. Everyone second-guesses things...especially for me. I was doing that Bayley character for seven years, and it brought me so much success. It brought me championships. And it brought me to the WWE. But I knew it was something that I didn't want to do forever. I want to experience everything in my career. And I want to be able to, you know, ride the wave and do all sorts of things. I knew I couldn't do it being that one character. But honestly, once I had the company's blessing

and Vince's blessing, I knew that I had to make it work. It didn't matter if people wanted to believe it or not. I had to make it work because it was my decision. And, if I failed, then I failed myself and I failed the company. But I definitely think people not believing in me helps, because you love to prove people wrong. I think it helps me, personally, but it also helped on screen. I'm really not doing it for them. I'm doing it for me.

**Castle:** There have been other great heroes in wrestling that either had to kind of be dragged kicking and screaming to turn, or just never did. I think of Ricky Steamboat or, for all those years, Hulk Hogan in the WWF, before he finally made the move in WCW. How much did you think about the fact that there's no coming back from this?



The ruthless Bayley we see today is a far cry from the affable babyface who would sooner hug an opponent than punch her in the face.

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**Bayley:** It's very difficult. And, you know, people saying, "You know, you can be the female John Cena" is obviously the biggest compliment in the whole world. Like, who doesn't want that? But, in my head, I'm like, "But there's no other John Cena. There's nobody that can do what he does." And for me, I just—I guess selfishly—I wanted to experience different things. It's like a relationship. When it's working, you're comfortable in your position. But, if you see the light at the end of the tunnel, or you think the grass is greener on the other side, you may as well take that leap. I only had myself to rely on, so it was scary. But I think if I hadn't made that decision, I would regret it forever.

**Castle:** The reality is that at the outset of your turn, it really wasn't the character that we see now. And I don't know that it was clicking right at the outset. I sort of likened it to the character of

"Sadness" from the Pixar movie *Inside Out*. That's what it reminded me of. And now it's evolved into something different. Was it clear to you that something wasn't clicking at first?

**Bayley:** I've always wanted to be like Eddie Guerrero in his WCW days, where he would come out and he would just look miserable with his wet hair. He was the cruiserweight champion, and he didn't want any part of it—that's the feeling that he was giving off. And he was too good for everything. I always thought that was cool. And no woman had really done that role. So, I was trying to do that. I think the reason it evolved is because of the pandemic, where there's no crowd and I can't come out like, miserable and boring and quiet. So, without the fans, I kind of just had to talk. I think that's where the talking and the obnoxiousness came from. But it really came

out naturally. I could find all that stuff in me.

**Castle:** You and Sasha were actually the very first to walk out into that empty Performance Center, right? I remember people being like, "This is weird," because you guys were still kind of finding your way, and you were almost cutting this promo for a crowd that wasn't there. How weird was that?

**Bayley:** Yeah, that was the strangest, strangest day ever. I remember being in the gym of the Performance Center. I was talking to Daniel Bryan, like, "This is so weird. What are we going to do? We have a promo and a match. It's not like one or the other. We have to do both without any fans." And he was like, "You know what? It's just a

new experience. We've just got to do our best." He was just trying to make me feel better. And then Cena walks in and he puts his two cents in. And he's like, "I'm excited because this is something I've never done before. I've literally done it all, done everything. But I have never done this." And then he just walked off. And I was like, *Yeah, I've never done this before*. So that helped me before I went out. Just to be excited about it, instead of looking at it like, "Dang, this sucks, why are we even doing this?" It made me excited. We all thought it was going to be a one-time deal. Nobody knew how big this pandemic was going to turn out to be. So, we were trying to make the best of it. I think maybe that's where the sparks of what I've turned into happened, because I felt like it was too quiet and I just had to yell.

**Castle:** So, now the inevitable happens, you and Sasha go your



separate ways. Is it bittersweet in that you're going to miss working with her as a partner? Or is it more exciting that you get to wrestle each other again and revisit those great matches that you had?

**Bayley:** I'm more looking forward to wrestling her again, because we've had our fun. Since I've been on the main roster with Raw and Smackdown, I've literally been at her side. And we've been involved in each other's stories, and we've been in stories with each other, and we've been tag team champions. We've done it all together. So, I think it was the perfect time to just be like, "Okay, we've had our fun, but now it's time to literally compete again." Because that's what I think helped our matches so much—deep down trying to prove who's better.

**Castle:** How much pressure is there on you and her to really deliver when you guys get back together in a ring? You were the first ever women to have *Pro Wrestling Illustrated's* Match of the Year. And that year, also, you had the first runner-up. Now both of you are further along in your careers and have matured as performers. The expectations are going to be so high when you get in the ring. What's that like for you?

**Bayley:** It's very, very scary and nerve-racking. It's kind of like: Fun time is over. For one thing, I'm nervous to wrestle her again, because it's been so long. And I don't want to disappoint her obviously. But I feel like, throughout this time, I've been so hard on myself for my matches. I try to make it different in how I envision wrestling or the story. But sometimes it doesn't come across, and I get really hard on myself. So, in these matches, I feel I really need to step up my game in every single



On good days, The Golden Role Models shined together as champions (above). Other times, the tension and mistrust were palpable, like when Banks helped Bayley retain her title at WrestleMania 36 (below).





While many fans expected Sasha Banks to turn on her partner, it was Bayley who ultimately betrayed Banks. The pair's gradual break-up has arguably been WWE's most compelling rivalry all year.

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way. And I know that I need to get in a ring and just envision it. I need to prepare now for the next, like, four months, or whatever. I'm not going to go day-by-day and prepare myself, but I need to prepare now. And I'm looking at it as if I'm preparing for a WrestleMania match. Because that's how big it is when we get in the ring together.

**Castle:** When you guys first started planting the seeds of this storyline early in the year, it wasn't really clicking either. And then, little by little, it really started to come together, to where now I think most people would say it's the best storyline in WWE all year. What is it about your chemistry, and about this slow burn storyline that has really captivated fans?

**Bayley:** I hope it's because it's coming off super real. There's so many real elements in it that we can use. From the

NXT days, fans have grown up with us. They've seen us in our very beginning days, and then evolving into the characters that we've become, and evolving into the people and performers that we are now. It's pretty real, and everything that we're doing, it really does make sense. Like me finally beating the crap out of her. To me, it makes sense. Like, why wouldn't I? I've seen how she's been looking at me. I've seen her eyes looking at the championship. And I've seen what she said about me online. Of course, I did what I did.

**Castle:** What would you say about the state of women's wrestling in WWE right now, especially given that there has been a lot of change? Charlotte's not around. Ronda is not around. Becky's not around. And that was kind of the big three for a while. They headlined WrestleMania, and you were just on the outside

of that. Now, it really has shifted to you, Sasha, and Asuka.

**Bayley:** It's just a mainstream thing where it's not a big deal anymore, which I love. We're so happy to be at that point. We rode that wave long enough. And now it's time to just be like, "Alright, we're here for business, just like everybody else." But, obviously, I think it can be so much better than what it is now. I think there's times where it's awesome and it's so cool to see everybody involved on the show. But it needs to be more. I want everyone to have a Sasha-Bayley storyline. I want all the shows to have that. We've been working with Asuka this year, and she's just the greatest. She's such a beast. I think as long as she's involved in something, it's going to be awesome. The whole Mandy and Sonya storyline was awesome. It was so different to have. I want to



see other people get used. I know how much potential everybody has.

**Castle:** What was it like having this chapter in your career where you were in a dominant tag team? I know you've been in tag team matches throughout your career, but you guys were like *the* tag team in WWE for a while there.

**Bayley:** Tag team wrestling is so amazing. And it's so different than being a singles wrestler. Before the tag team titles came about, we had hundreds of tag matches on the live events. But they were, like, pointless tag matches. And I would always just have the match to have the match, because that's what it was. But once we decided that we actually wanted to be a tag team, that we were going to have a tag team name (The Golden Role Models), we were going to have matching gear, we were going to have these titles come to life, it changed everything. And everything I thought I knew about tag team wrestling was erased, because it's just so different. And

everything we learned in that first run, we used in our second run. But we had to obviously tweak things here and there. And I think the second run with our tag title was one we wanted to have in the beginning.

**Castle:** Let me ask about something that we've seen in women's wrestling outside WWE, and I always wonder if it'll ever work its way into WWE. That's intergender matches. Do you see there ever being room for that in WWE, outside of kind of like the freak show kind of presentation? Can you see the day—and do you want to see the day—where maybe you can work with a man just as well as with a woman?

**Bayley:** Yeah, I think it would be awesome. But I don't know how everybody would feel about that. I came from the indies where I was the only girl training. So, I trained with guys for four years straight—never trained with a girl. And I've had matches with men as well. And I know a lot of the girls who came from the indies did. So, I think it would be a lot of fun. You would learn so

much. Everybody would learn so much just being in there with a guy. It's just different, being able to do things that you can't necessarily do with Alexa Bliss. I think it would be fun. And if this ever happens, in my first match, I would like to wrestle Randy Orton.

**Castle:** Any other thoughts? I know a lot of people your age grew up with wrestling magazines. How cool is it to be the #1 woman in the *PWI* "Women's 100?"

**Bayley:** It's pretty crazy. I've obviously grown up with *PWI*, and I'm just such a huge wrestling nerd. So, even when I didn't know what *PWI* was—because I always bought the *WWF* magazines or had them shipped to me—I would see it on the newsstands, and I would just want it because I could see my favorite wrestler on the cover. Or, if I'd flip to the first page, my favorite wrestlers were on it. So now it's going to be cool, I think, to actually see it and to hear people's response to it. And I hope everybody's mad that I'm number one and Sasha isn't. □



In 2015, Bayley and Banks tore the house down at two consecutive TakeOver events (including TakeOver: Brooklyn, pictured here). Five years later, the pressure is on to deliver another classic bout.

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# THE 2020 PWI WOMEN'S 100

**W**ITH WOMEN PLAYING a bigger role in this year's *PWI* "500" list, we were asked by quite a few readers whether we would continue on with this year's "Women's 100" list. The answer was a resounding and unhesitating "YES!"

There are several reasons for this. The first is that the "500" list currently only includes women who compete in intergender matches. Not because they are the only wrestlers "good" enough to make the list, but simply because we have historically viewed the "500" as a definitive ranking of the global field of wrestlers who vie for heavy-weight titles.

Another reason is that, at the highest level, pro wrestling remains largely segregated by gender, with WWE, AEW, Japan, and Mexico largely booking men and women to compete for their own respective prizes. And, for women, those titles are far fewer in number. For example, WWE's male wrestlers can compete for the United States and Intercontinental titles, which benefits them in a big way in the "500" issue. The "Women's 100" not only recognizes women's championships, but weighs their historical importance—giving them (in most cases) special consideration over other titles in determining a wrestler's ranking.

Finally, our annual ranking of women's wrestlers has become increasingly popular over the years—offering more photos and longer entries than the "500," as well as an annual bird's-eye view of women's wrestling that no other print publication provides. There are many readers who enjoy this issue as much—or even more—than its

predecessor. And so, in the spirit of highlighting these athletes, the "Women's 100" lives on.

Last year's "Women's 100" was remarkably difficult to compile, with quite a few worthy stars not quite making the cut. The same was certainly true this year, even with the pandemic limiting activity for most of the world's grapplers.

Speaking of which, the evaluation period for this list is October 1, 2019, through September 30, 2020, though we have given special consideration to the momentum athletes had prior to the COVID-19 shutdown.

Like the *PWI* "500," the "Women's 100" is ranked based on the following criteria:

- CHAMPIONSHIPS WON
- QUALITY OF OPPOSITION
- TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY
- WIN-LOSS RECORDS
- OVERALL ACTIVITY
- MOMENTUM/PROMOTIONAL "PUSH"

(Note: The parenthetical information alongside each name represents the wrestler's height, weight, years pro, and last year's ranking, if applicable.)

The "Women's 100" was compiled in an after-hours meeting by a special committee assembled for this task: Al Castle, Andrea Hangst, Kristen Ashly, Pat Laprade, and Kevin McElvaney. The entries themselves were researched and written by Castle, Ashly, and Laprade, along with Contributing Writer Jason McVeigh.

Without further ado ... we hope you enjoy this year's edition of the *PWI* "Women's 100."



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# 1. **BAYLEY**

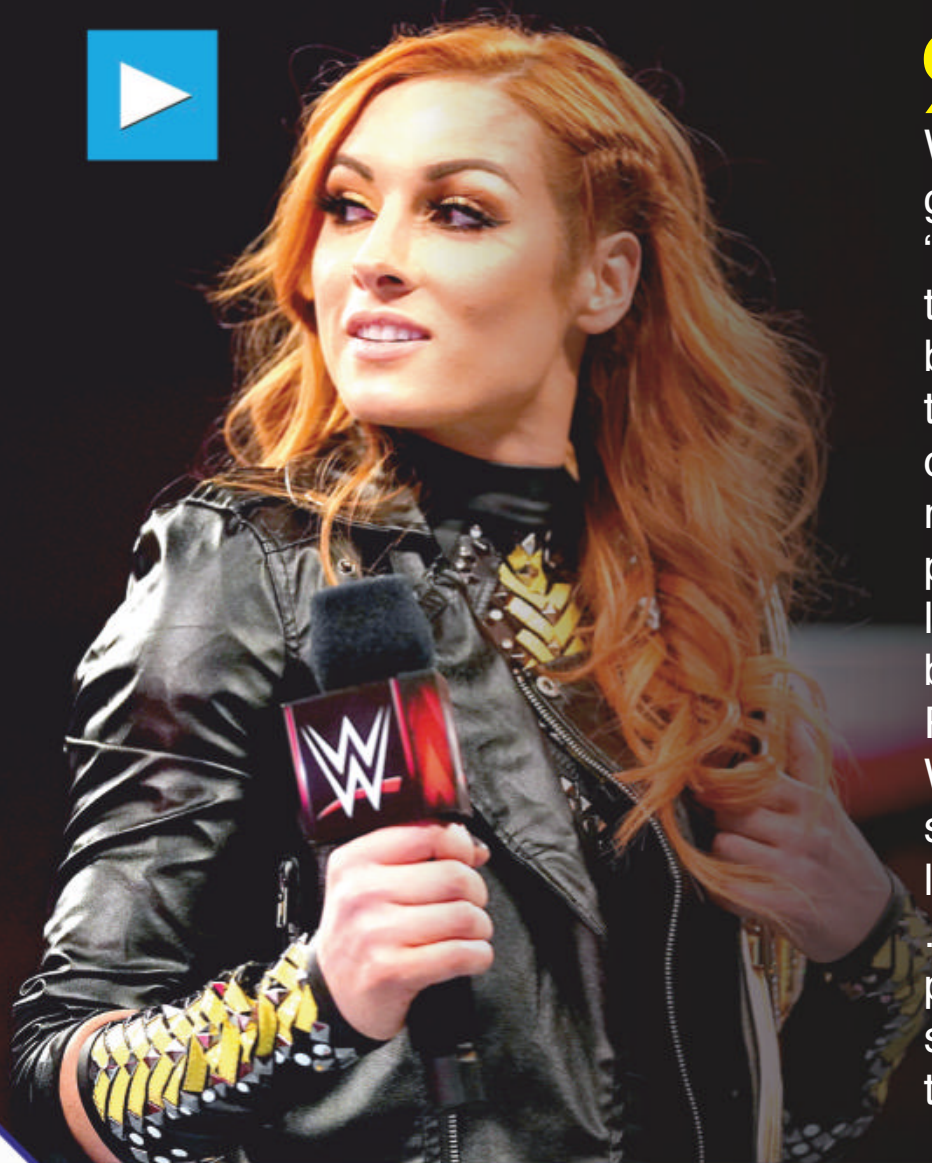
◆ (5'6", 119, 12, 6)

WWE's "Role Model" exerted her dominance over two different brands, both as the longest-reigning Smackdown Women's champion in history and as one-half of the Women's tag team champions ... Having won the Smackdown title in October of 2019, has already doubled the length of the previous record holder ... Has defended the belt against most everyone in the division, including Asuka, Tamina, Nikki Cross, and Naomi, and against five separate challengers in a WrestleMania elimination match ... As tense as it was, partnership with Sasha Banks brought out the best in Bayley, and led to her becoming "Bayley Dos Straps" when the duo beat Cross and Alexa Bliss for the tag title.



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# 2. **BECKY LYNCH**

◆ (5'6", 137, 18, 1)

WWE may have lost the biggest star on its roster when "The Man" announced in May that she was taking a hiatus to become "The Mom" ... Left as the undefeated Raw Women's champion, having won the belt more than a year earlier ... Got past some of her toughest challengers to date early this year by beating Asuka at the Royal Rumble and Shayna Baszler at WrestleMania ... In between, somehow found the time to learn how to drive a 16-wheeler ... Oozes the kind of innate star power that even some of the sport's biggest names aspire to, but never achieve.



### 3. **ASUKA** (5'3", 135, 17, 11)

After focusing on her Kabuki Warriors tag team for much of 2018, Asuka returned to being a force in the singles division in 2020 ... Wore the tag team championship for most of the first half of the evaluation period with Kairi Sane ... Won the Money in the Bank ladder match for what she thought was a women's title opportunity, but was actually for the Raw Women's title, vacated by Becky Lynch ... Lost the title to Sasha Banks in July, but won it back at SummerSlam—an event at which she also challenged Bayley for the Smackdown title ... Delivers the most impassioned promos in WWE, regardless of language.



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PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



### 4. **CHARLOTTE FLAIR** (5'11", 143, 8, 2)

Before taking an extended absence in June, WWE's "Queen" padded her remarkable résumé with more records, accomplishments, and gold belts ... Early in the evaluation period, beat Bayley for her record-setting fifth Smackdown title ... Eliminated four women en route to winning the 2020 Women's Royal Rumble match ... Opted to challenge for the NXT championship at WrestleMania and beat Rhea Ripley to win the title, six years after she last wore it ... Abbreviated return to NXT also saw her beat Mia Yim and Bianca Belair ... Adapted better than most WWE wrestlers to performing in front of an empty arena.





## 5. **SASHA BANKS** (5'5", 114, 10, 14)

After taking four months off in 2019 to reassess her career, the “Boss” of WWE’s women’s division has looked as good as she has in years, and along the way picked up two championships ... Beat Asuka by countout in July to win her fifth Raw Women’s championship, but lost it back to Asuka in her first title defense a month later ... Her tag team championship partner, Bayley, factored into most of Banks’ key wins and losses ... Following months of tension, the Golden Role Models finally imploded in September, signaling an inevitable sequel to their 2015 Match of the Year.

## 6. **HIKARU SHIDA** (5'4", 126, 12, 62)

Hard-hitting Japanese star climbed through the ranks of AEW’s fledgling women’s division until becoming its third champion in May ... Beat Nyla Rose for the title at Double or Nothing in a no-countout, no-disqualification match to win the title ... Won a four-way match involving Kris Statlander, Penelope Ford, and Riho in March ... Wrestled seven times in two nights on a pair of shows she promoted in Japan dubbed “Hikaru Shida’s Revolution” ... Has also competed in Japan’s Oz Academy promotion ... Pummels opponents with an assortment of kicks and knee strikes ... Outside the ring, has found success as an actress and model.





## 7. **TESSA BLANCHARD**

◆ (5'5", 140-, 6, 5)

Although she had plenty of success against female opponents, it was the third-generation star's success against men that cemented her spot in the top 10 and in the history books ... After months of anticipation, got a shot at the Impact heavyweight championship at January's Hard to Kill pay-per-view, and beat Sami Callihan to become the first woman to hold the title ... Only defended the title once (against Taya Valkyrie) before being stripped of the title and released by Impact in June ... Ring savvy and knack for conveying emotion make her a hot free agent, but backstage reputation adds some baggage.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

## 8. **RIHO**

◆ (5'1", 99, 14, 43)

Diminutive dynamo became the inaugural AEW Women's champion just days into our evaluation period by beating Nyla Rose on the debut episode of *Dynamite* ... Managed an impressive reign (albeit with limited defenses) of four-and-a-half months ... Retained the title in a four-way match involving Nyla Rose, Hikaru Shida, and Britt Baker ... Had other defenses against Emi Sakura and Kris Statlander ... Has been unable to compete on American soil since March because of the COVID-19 pandemic ... Has kept busy in STARDOM, where she wore the High Speed title for nearly a year before losing it in July.



PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW





## 9. **IO SHIRAI** (5'1", 119, 13, 8)

Widely regarded as one of the very best female talents on the NXT roster since she joined it three-and-a-half years ago, the “Genius of the Sky” finally ascended to the top of the brand when she beat Rhea Ripley and Charlotte Flair in a triple-threat match for the NXT Women’s title in June ... Has bested Tegan Nox and Dakota Kai in title defenses since then ... Won a six-woman ladder match with an NXT title shot on the line, but came up short in her first championship challenge against Flair ... Has all the tools—including a decent grasp of the English language—to go far in WWE.

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## 10. **MAYU IWATANI** (5'4", 115, 9, 16)

Second go-round with the World of Stardom championship has already surpassed 300 days, and has included defenses against Jungle Kyona, Momo Watanabe, and Kagetsu ... Defeated Bea Priestley for the title in November ... Split her first two matches in the prestigious 5Star Grand Prix 2020 tournament, beating Starlight Kid, but losing to Giulia ... Wrestled in a dark match on NJPW’s Wrestle Kingdom event in the Tokyo Dome, teaming with Arisa Hoshiki to beat Giulia and Hana Kimura ... Known as the “icon” of Stardom for her impressive list of accomplishments in the company, including multiple tournament victories and a dozen championship reigns.



PHOTO BY YUICHI KOJIMA



### 11. **RHEA RIPLEY** (5'7", 143, 7, 35)

Popular Aussie had a career-making six months during the first half of the evaluation period ... Defeated Shayna Baszler in December to capture the NXT Women's championship ... Accomplished a career goal by competing at WrestleMania, but unfortunately lost her title to Charlotte Flair on the show ... Impressed during NXT's invasion of Raw and Smackdown in November—beating Flair and Sasha Banks in a triple threat match, and leading Team NXT to victory at Survivor Series ... Also captained the winning team in the first ever female War Games match.



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PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

### 12. **JORDYNNE GRACE** (5'2", 160, 10, 26)

Texan powerhouse won the Impact Wrestling Knockouts title in January by defeating Taya Valkyrie ... Had multiple successful title defenses, including against Lacey Ryan, Havok, and Kimber Lee, before losing the belt to Deonna Purrazzo at Slammiversary in July ... Got another shot at the title against Purrazzo in Impact's first women's 30-minute iron man match in August, but lost two falls to one ... Has been an important voice in the #Speaking-Out movement, helping shed light on the unique obstacles faced by women in the pro wrestling industry.



### 13. **SHAYNA BASZLER** (5'7", 160, 5, 4)

Intimidating bruiser's dominance continued even after her 416-day reign as NXT Women's champion ended weeks into the evaluation period ... Set the record for most eliminations in the Women's Royal Rumble with eight ... Similarly tore through the Elimination Chamber match, making all five opponents submit en route to earning a championship match at WrestleMania ... Lost that bout to Becky Lynch ... Made Bayley submit at Payback to win the Women's tag team championship with Nia Jax.



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PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

### 14. **THUNDER ROSA** (5'3", 132, 6, 97)

Enigmatic competitor has become a breakout star in the revamped National Wrestling Alliance, where she holds the NWA Women's championship ... Beat Allysia Kay at the Hard Times PPV in January to capture the belt ... Had an impressive run in AEW over the summer, beating Serena Deeb and memorably challenging Hikaru Shida for her title at All Out ... Competed in an MMA fight for Combate Americas last November, and announced expansion of her own women's wrestling promotion, Mission Pro Wrestling, in June.



### 15. **KIMBER LEE** (5'4", 135, 11, 90)

Won the SHIMMER championship in a four-way match involving Nicole Savoy, Priscilla Kelly, and Shotzi Blackheart at the company's last event before the COVID-19 shutdown ... The "Crown Jewel" signed a long-term contract with Impact in August after beating Havok in her first match with the help of some brass knuckles ... Has also thrived in CHIKARA, where she teamed with Ophidian and Lance Steel to win the 2019 King of Trios tournament.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

### 16. **NYLA ROSE** (5'7", 185, 7, 66)

The "Native Beast" ended Riho's 133-day reign as AEW Women's champion with a devastating sit-out powerbomb in February ... Successfully defended the title against Kris Statlander at the Revolution pay-per-view later that month ... Vowed to have a years-long reign, but lost the title to Hikaru Shida in May ... Sought to get back on track by hiring Vickie Guerrero as her manager ... Member of the Oneida tribe takes great pride in representing indigenous American wrestlers.





## 17. **TAYA VALKYRIE**

(5'8", 10, 15) Impact mainstay held the Knockouts title for a remarkable 377 days before losing it in January to Jordynne Grace ... Successfully defended the title against former champion Madison Rayne and against Tenille Dashwood at Bound for Glory ... Challenged Tessa Blanchard for the Impact heavy-weight title in February, but lost ... Also very active in Mexico, where she is the reigning AAA Reina de Reinas (Queen of Queens) champion ... Owes a few wins to manager John E. Bravo.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

## 18. **KAY LEE RAY**

(5'8", 112, 11, 47) Scottish-born wrestler has held the NXT U.K. Women's title for the entire evaluation period, but hasn't had much to do as of late because of the brand's pandemic shutdown ... Beat former champion Toni Storm in an I Quit match in January ... Also retained in a triple-threat match against Storm and Piper Niven at TakeOver: Blackpool II ... Beat NXT standout Mia Yim at the Worlds Collide WWE Network special in January.



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## 19. **KYLIE RAE**

(5'5", 145, 4, NL) After causing a stir with her decision to quit AEW in the summer of 2019, the cheerful Chicago native kept busy on the indies before signing with Impact in March ... Won a ten-woman gauntlet match at Slammiversary in July to earn a shot at the Knockouts title ... Has also picked up wins against former Knockouts champs Rosemary and Taya Valkyrie ... Captured titles in several independent promotions, including Black Label Pro, Freelance, and Sabotage.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

## 20. **NIKKI CROSS**

(5', 121, 12, 18) Caffeinated competitor found success in WWE as the unlikely protégé (and tag partner) of Alexa Bliss ... The duo beat the Kabuki Warriors to win the Women's tag team championship at WrestleMania and held it for two months ... Won a four-way match to earn a shot against Smackdown Women's champion Bayley at Extreme Rules, but came up short in her title challenge ... Had a falling out with Bliss over the summer, and beat her mentor on Smackdown in July.



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## 21. **KAIRI SANE**

(5'1", 115, 8, 16) With her partner Asuka, as The Kabuki Warriors, she won the WWE Women's tag team title from Alexa Bliss and Nikki Cross at Hell in a Cell in October ... After losing the belts back to Bliss and Cross at WrestleMania 36, the Japan native mainly wrestled in singles competition ... In July, the "Pirate Princess" had two huge wins over Sasha Banks and Bayley ... The latter was her last match with WWE, as she decided to move back to Japan after three years in America ... Combining both high-flying and strong styles, even outside of WWE, she won't be one to easily forget.



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## 22. **BRITT BAKER**

(5'7", 135, 5, 33) One of AEW's pillars, Baker injured herself in May, just a few months after turning heel ... Her critically acclaimed segments on Dynamite helped her jump 11 places in this ranking, even after missing four months of ring action ... The self-proclaimed role model came back to action at All Out in September, losing against Big Swole in a Tooth and Nail Match ... Over the evaluation period, the Pennsylvania native had wins over the likes of Priscilla Kelly, Allie, Bea Priestley, and Penelope Ford ... The Lockjaw is her favorite finishing maneuver, reminding everyone of her real-life job.

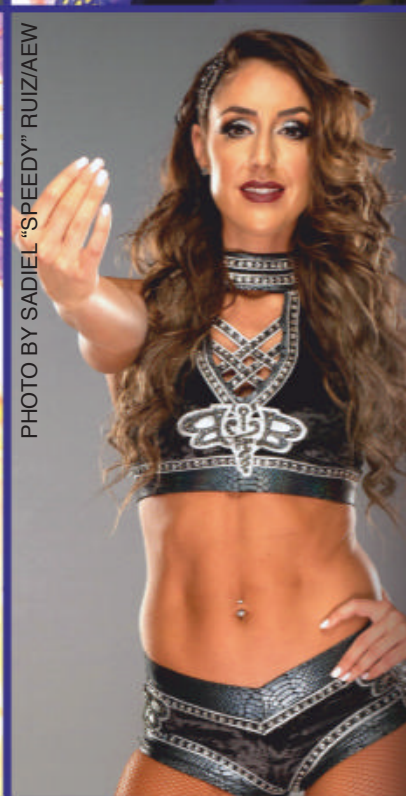


PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW



**23. BIANCA BELAIR** (5'7", 134, 4, 36) Jumping from #36 to #23, it's been a career year for "The EST Of WWE" ... The Knoxville native represented NXT at Survivor Series, helping her team win against Team Raw and Team Smackdown ... Had a feud with NXT champion Rhea Ripley before being called up to Raw, where she teamed up with Angelo Dawkins and Montez Ford to take on Angel Garza, Andrade, and Zelina Vega ... One of the most well-rounded athletes in WWE, she lasted 33 minutes in the Royal Rumble, eliminating 7 competitors ... She finishes her opponents with either a 450 splash or the Kiss of Death.



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**24. DAKOTA KAI** (5'6", 121, 13, NL) Coming back from a knee injury that kept her out of this ranking last year, she found a partner who could understand what she went through in Tegan Nox ... But when her quest for gold didn't pan out the way she wanted, she turned on her at NXT TakeOver: War Games ... Known for her strong kicks, she defeated Nox in a streetfight and then in a cage match ... Aligning herself with bodyguard Raquel Gonzalez, she defeated Rhea Ripley to earn a title shot against Io Shirai at TakeOver XXX in August ... Auckland, New Zealand-born grappler also wrestled in the Women's Royal Rumble and was voted "Future Star Of NXT."



**25. ALLYSIN KAY** (5'10", 150, 12, 19) As the evaluation period began, a new weekly wrestling show started ... NWA *Powerrr* gave a new opportunity for the NWA Women's champion to showcase her abilities ... Kay wrestled on the second show, defeating Ashley Vox ... Was on the winning side of a tag team match on the first rechristened NWA PPV in January ... Defended the title against ODB and Rain, before losing it to Thunder Rosa at NWA's Hard Times PPV in January, ending her 272-day reign ... Native Detroit also lost the SHINE title to Mercedes Martinez in December, ending a 221-day reign ... Uses the AK47 (a Yokosuka cutter) as her finisher ... Also competed for SHIMMER, EVOLVE, and RISE.

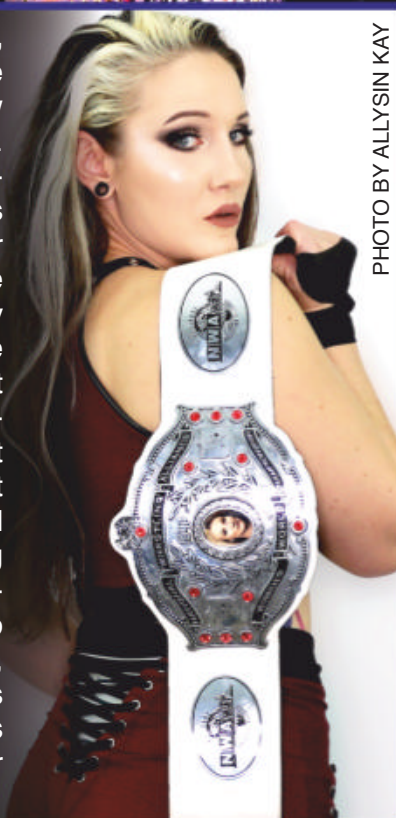


PHOTO BY ALLYSIN KAY

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**26. TEGAN NOX** (5'6", 141, 7, NL) Finally, an injury-free year for Nox, who's had her share of problems with both knees since joining the NXT brand ... Teaming with Dakota Kai, she had two WWE Women's tag team title opportunities against The Kabuki Warriors ... At NXT TakeOver: War Games, Kai turned on her, starting a rivalry that is still ongoing ... The former Nixon Newell ended up in a streetfight and a cage match against her ex-partner ... "The Girl With The Shiniest Wizard" also made her WWE main roster debut at the Royal Rumble in January, and was brought back on *Smackdown* in August in another battle royal to determine the #1 contender.



**27. ALEXA BLISS** (5'1", 101, 7, 12)) With her new best friend Nikki Cross, lost the WWE Women's tag team belts to The Kabuki Warriors at Hell in a Cell in October, only to win them back at WrestleMania 36, making Bliss and Cross the first two-time champions ... Lost the title to Sasha Banks and Bayley on *Smackdown* in May, leading to a feud that lasted all summer ... Since being caught in the middle of a Bray Wyatt-Braun Strowman feud, her attitude's changed ... She turned on Cross using "The Fiend's" Sister Abigail maneuver ... Strong from her cheerleading and bodybuilding backgrounds, the fierce "Little Miss Bliss" drew number one in the Women's Royal Rumble in January.



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PHOTO BY YUICHI KOJIMA

**28. MOMO WATANABE** (5'1", 117, 6, 32) One of the most talented wrestlers in Stardom, the 20-year-old *joshi* has won the Artist of Stardom championship, Stardom's version of a trios title, with AZM and Utami Hayashishita, a team dubbed Queen's Quest ... In singles competition, she lost a hard-hitting contest against World of Stardom champion Mayu Iwatani at the promotion's 9th anniversary show in January ... A former World of Stardom champion herself, also scored wins against Queen's Quest's teammates in the 5Star Grand Prix 2020 tournament ... Was in a feud with the Oedo Tai faction most of the year ... Uses the Peach Sunrise—a bridging pumphandle half-nelson suplex—as her finisher.





### 29. **MERCEDES MARTINEZ**

(5'7", 147, 20, 9) After close to 20 years in the business, "The Latina Sensation" was finally signed by WWE ... She surprised everyone by taking part in the Women's Royal Rumble ... The Connecticut native aligned herself with Robert Stone in NXT ... After scoring wins against Shotzi Blackheart and Santana Garrett, she lost a steel cage match against Rhea Ripley in the main event of NXT Super Tuesday II in September ... Over the evaluation period, she held many titles, including for SHINE, Femmes Fatales, Belatrix, as well as the SHIMMER tag title with Cheerleader Melissa ... Respected by most everyone in the wrestling world, she also competed for AEW, Pro Wrestling: EVE, and Beyond Wrestling.



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PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

### 30. **DEONNA PURRAZZO**

(5'8", 112, 11, 47) After departing from WWE, "The Virtuosa" made a splash in her new home by defeating Impact Wrestling Knockouts champion Jordynne Grace at Slammiversary in July to win the title ... She successfully defended the belt in August in a 30-minute iron-man match against the former champion ... That allowed her to make a huge jump, gaining 55 places from last year's ranking ... A master technician, she uses the Fujiwara armbar as her finishing move ... Aside from appearing on NXT, she also wrestled on *Main Event* and *Raw* ... Before signing with WWE, she competed for promotions such as Ring of Honor, SHIMMER, and Stardom.



### 31. **KRIS STATLANDER**

(5'8", 165, 4, 100) From the 100th position in last year's ranking to a contract with AEW, everything happened quite fast for "The Galaxy's Greatest Alien" ... After making her pro debut in November 2016, she quickly rose on the independent scene ... Started in AEW in November ... Defeated Hikaru Shida and Britt Baker to become the number-one contender, but fell short against AEW Women's champion Riho ... Had another title opportunity at Revolution in February, but lost to Nyla Rose ... Won the AAW Women's title from Jessicka Havok in December ... Had singles wins over Mercedes Martinez, Tennille Dashwood, and Ivelisse ... Former gymnast and stunt double also wrestled for SHIMMER, CZW, and Beyond Wrestling.



PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

### 32. **IVELISSE**

(5'4", 120, 17, NL) With fellow Latina wrestler Diamante, won the AEW Women's Tag Team Cup tournament, defeating Brandi Rhodes and Allie in the final in August ... To get there, they beat the team of Anna Jay and Tay Conti, as well as Dasha Gonzalez and Rachael Ellering ... The 17-year vet won the SHINE title by defeating Mercedes Martinez in December, becoming the first 3-time champion ... Made her Canadian debut in February wrestling for Femmes Fatales in Ottawa ... Known for her strong style, she also wrestled in England and in her native Puerto Rico, where she held the Wrestling Superstar Women's title ... Had a WWE try-out at the start of the evaluation period.



### 33. **JESSICKA HAVOK**

(6', 225, 17, 30) One of the mainstays of Impact Wrestling women's division, she challenged Knockouts champion Taya Valkyrie in her native Ohio in December ... Feuded with Su Yung, until she became Susie because of Havok's actions ... The former Knockouts champ was joined by longtime friend Nevaeh in April, as the two started feuding with Kiera Hogan and Tasha Steelz ... Together known as the "Killer Death Machines," they were Guardians of RISE champions throughout the evaluation period ... Also held the AAW Women's title, but lost it in December ... Scored singles wins over Kris Statlander, Rosemary, Madison Rayne, and Marti Belle ... Also challenged Kimber Lee for the SHIMMER title.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

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### 34. **CANDICE LeRAE**

(5'2", 110, 18, 65) On October 2, 2019, when the Wednesday Night War started, LeRae was featured in an NXT Women's title match against champion Shayna Baszler ... Feuded with Mia Yim, winning a streetfight at The Great American Bash ... Teaming with real-life husband Johnny Gargano, she defeated the team of Keith Lee and Yim twice in intergender matches ... Native Californian was also a participant in the 2020 Women's Royal Rumble ... Defeated Kacy Catanzaro, Santana Garrett, and Dakota Kai in singles competition ... Known for her explosive offense and high-flying abilities, she also cohosts "Dinner With The Garganos" on NXT TV.





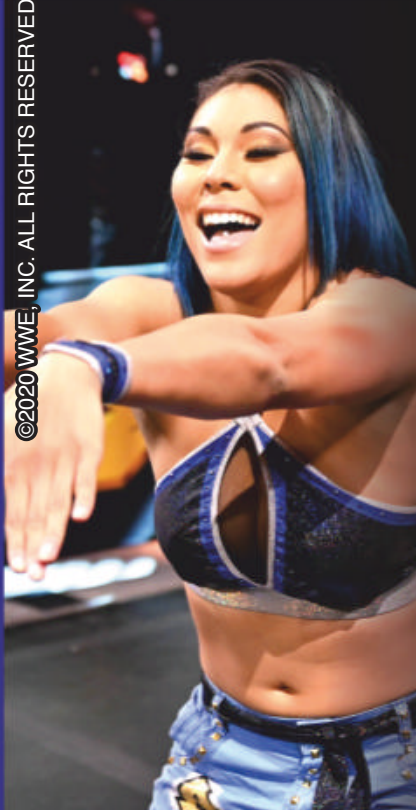
**35. LUFISTO** (5'2", 165, 24, 34) "The Wounded Owl" started the evaluation period with a bang, winning the wXw Femmes Fatales tournament in Germany in October ... Also challenged wXw Women's champion (and fellow French-speaker) Amale ... The Quebec native avenged her loss against Priscilla Kelly at Femmes Fatales 23 in February in Ottawa ... Lost to Nyla Rose at FLQ in Montreal ... Known for being a forerunner in intergender matches, she defeated former ECW TV champion 2 Cold Scorpio, wrestled Markus Burke and Josh Alexander in a 3-way dance, and won LLCV's primary title ... Uses a Burning Hammer to finish her opponents ... Signed a book deal with ECW Press.



PHOTO BY JEAN-MICHEL DUMAIS

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**36. MIA YIM** (5'7", 132, 11, 25) Had been feuding with Dakota Kai almost all year, ever since the latter attacked her prior to NXT TakeOver: War Games ... Actually wrestled 16 times against Kai in different kinds of matches over the evaluation period ... At NXT TakeOver: In Your House in June, she was on the winning side of a six-woman tag match against Candice LeRae, Raquel Gonzalez, and Kai ... The "H.B.I.C." also wrestled Charlotte Flair, Kay Lee Ray, Io Shirai, and Deonna Purrazzo ... With Keith Lee, feuded with The Garganos ... The "Blasian Bladdie" was also part of the Women's Royal Rumble ... Known for her strikes and submissions, she has a solid background in Muay Thai and Taekwondo.



**37. BEA PRIESTLEY** (5'7", 141, 5, 20) This international competitor started the year on a strong note, holding the World of Stardom title and being featured on AEW's second *Dynamite* ever ... Defended the Stardom title against the late, great Hana Kimura, before losing it to Mayu Iwatani in November ... Five days later, the high-flying Briton was facing off with Britt Baker on AEW's first PPV since being on TV ... With partner Jamie Hayter, made it to the final of the Goddesses of Stardom Tag League tournament ... Won Stardom's tag team title at the company's ninth-anniversary show ... Known for being a fearsome wrestler, she joined the Oedo Tai heel faction after turning on Queen's Quest stablemate Momo Watanabe.

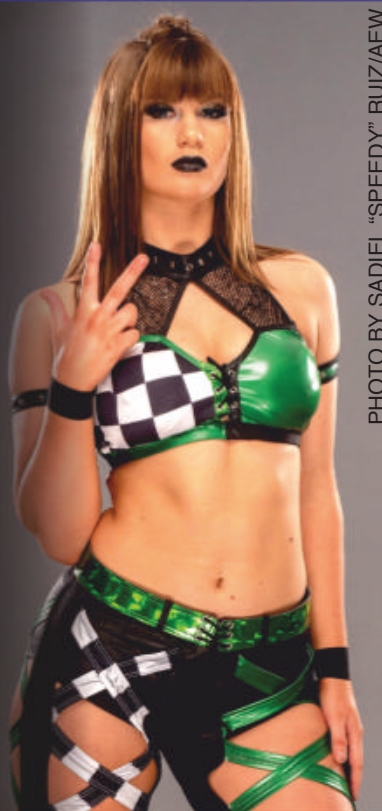


PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

**38. PRISCILLA KELLY** (5'5", 128, 5, NL) If last year she was mainly known for the infamous "Tampon Gate" viral video, she let her wrestling speak for itself during this evaluation period ... Made her SHIMMER debut, scoring wins over Dust and Shazza McKenzie, eventually challenging for the title ... Made her AEW *Dynamite* debut against Britt Baker ... Won the F1RST Wrestling Uptown VFW title, beating Arik Cannon, Orange Cassidy, and Darin Corbin in a 4-way match in January ... "Hell's Favorite Harlot" also competed against the likes of LuFisto, Chris Dickinson, and Jordynne Grace, wrestling for such promotions as Femmes Fatales, RISE, and Bar Wrestling.



**39. BIG SWOLE** (5'5", 133, 5, NL) Formerly known as Aerial Monroe, the charismatic Big Swole started a feud in AEW with an injured, but obnoxious Britt Baker ... Former U.S. Air Force mechanic won a Tooth and Nail Match against Baker at All Out in September ... With her frequent tag partner "Li'l Swole" (aka Nicole Savoy), she made it to the semi-finals of the AEW Women's Tag Team Cup tournament ... The Swole Family also challenged for SHIMMER's tag team belts ... Held the SHINE tag team title with Aja Perera before losing it in January ... In singles competition, the current Phoenix of RISE champion wrestled against Mercedes Martinez, Hikaru Shida, and Laynie Luck.



PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

**40. NICOLE SAVOY** (5'7", 145, 9, 10) With a 721-day reign, Savoy became the longest reigning SHIMMER champion, losing the title in November in a four-way dance ... Made her Ring of Honor debut in December, wrestling with and against veteran Sumie Sakai ... As "Li'l Swole," she teamed with Big Swole in the AEW Women's Tag Team Cup tournament, losing in the penultimate round ... Known for her submission holds and background in martial arts, the "Queen of Suplexes" wrestled for the PROGRESS Women's belt against *joshi* legend Meiko Satomura in Seattle, as well as for the vacant Femmes Fatales title in Ottawa ... Also competed for Pro-Wrestling EVE, Bar Wrestling, and Stardom.





**41. FAYE JACKSON** (5'4", 4, NL) After gracing us with her presence for four years, Jackson makes her debut on the *PWI* "Women's 100" all the way at an impressive #41 ... She also climbed her way onto the *PWI* "500" (#160) after a stellar year in intergender wrestling ... Jackson is still the Pro Wrestling Magic Women's champ, holding the title now for nearly two years ... Earlier this year, she announced the much-anticipated "Grey Sweatpants Battle Royal," later canceled due to the pandemic ... Her refusal to apologize for who she is makes Jackson a standout for positivity and acceptance in this year's list.



PHOTO BY JON WASHER

**42. ROSEMARY** (5'7", 13, 21) The "Demon Assassin" took part in several important matches throughout the evaluation period, both in Impact and outside of it ... For Impact, Rosemary competed in the intergender Call Your Shot Gauntlet at Bound for Glory, Full Metal Mayhem at Rebellion 2020, and a PPV singles match against Madison Rayne last December (which she won) ... Outside of Impact, Rosemary faced a pre-NXT Shotzi Blackheart in a much-discussed no-holds-barred match at RISE's La Escalera event ... The inaugural Smash Women's champ, she wore the title for the entirety of our evaluation period ... An entertaining presence on Impact's "Wrestle House" segments.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

**43. LACEY EVANS** (5'8", 130, 6, 23) Enjoyed the spotlight over the last 12 months in a way few other WWE stars have ... Participated in 50 matches during the evaluation period, averaging roughly one match per week, including 25 matches where she faced WWE Women's title holders and three #1 contendership bouts ... Competed at five pay-per-views, including the 15-person elimination triple-threat at Survivor Series (as part of the Smackdown team), a match against Bayley at Royal Rumble, a SmackDown Women's title fatal five-way at WrestleMania 36, and the women's Money in the Bank Ladder Match ... Despite being prominently featured, has yet to capture gold in WWE.



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**44. SU YUNG** (5'6", 140, 13, 31) Reverted back to "Susie" earlier this year, but has been her usual hardcore self the entire period ... The "Undead Bride" wrestled within 10 promotions throughout the year, including a hardcore intergender match at Prestige Wrestling, a #1 contendership scramble at SHIMMER Vol. 114, the ACW 14th Annual Lone Star Classic, and a victory over Kris Statlander at Queens of Combat 39: In Your Palace 2 ... Yung remained a fixture of weekly Impact storylines as Susie, a soft-spoken wrestler with a middling win-loss record ... Prior to her transformation, defeated Havok in a weapons match and competed in a four-way dance at WrestleCade.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

**45. TONI STORM** (5'5", 142, 11, 13) Storm was a highly visible star for WWE before getting stuck across the Atlantic ... She appeared in several promotions outside of WWE, including PROGRESS, Defiant, WrestleRock, and SOUL 8 ... Inside WWE, she appeared stateside much more often this year, notably competing on the NXT team at Survivor Series and entering the Royal Rumble ... Though seen across brands, Storm drops to #45 after losing several NXT U.K. Women's championship bouts and the WWE NXT Women's title match at Worlds Collide to Rhea Ripley ... Fans are left wondering when Toni might appear on the main roster.



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**46. SHOTZI BLACKHEART** (5'6", 125, 5, 78) Shot up the rankings after a career-making year ... WWE signed Blackheart on Oct. 15 ... She debuted in-ring for NXT on December 5 and on TV two weeks later ... After signing with WWE, Blackheart dropped the SHINE Nova championship and the Sabotage War of the Genders title ... Throughout the year, she averaged one match per week ... The "Hardcore Queen" continued her reign of destruction in death-matches and other no-DQ bouts ... Competed in #1 contender battle royal for the NXT Women's and SmackDown Women's titles ... "The Ballsy Badass" also appeared in the 2020 Women's Royal Rumble match.



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**47. JAMIE HAYTER** (5'7", 158, 5, NL) Garnered attention in the U.S. after appearing on AEW *Dynamite* twice in 2019 ... Lost a singles match against Britt Baker, and then defeated then-AEW Women's champ Riho in a tag team outing with Emi Sakura ... Has kept busy with Stardom, grabbing the Goddesses of Stardom championship with Bea Priestley ... Also held the SWA Undisputed Women's title and the EVE International title ... Competed in several intergender matches, including teaming with CIMA at Sumire Natsu Produce Forever in Tokyo ... Fought for the RevPro Undisputed British Women's championship, but lost to Gisele Shaw.



PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

**48. PENELOPE FORD** (5'4", 125, 6, NL) After working as a valet for Kip Sabian, finally saw in-ring action for AEW ... Competed in matches on 11 episodes of *Dark* and five episodes of *Dynamite* ... On the Jericho Cruise, she and Sabian battled Kenny Omega and Riho in a mixed-tag bout that aired on *Dark* ... Lost to Kris Statlander at Double or Nothing ... Challenged Hikaru Shida to an AEW Women's title match at Fyter Fest ... Participated in the AEW Women's Tag Team Cup tournament with Mel ... They were eliminated in the first round ... Quickly becoming one of the most popular faces of the AEW women's division.



PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

**49. RHIA O'REILLY** (5'7", 168, 10, 79) Remains the fighting champ of Pro Wrestling: EVE ... Still in her third reign as EVE champion, a reign now lasting over 400 days ... Competed in seven different EVE events, including the SHE-1 and Wrestle Queendom 3 ... Made it to the semifinals of the company's tag title tournament ... Outside of EVE, she wrestled for SHIMMER and competed in the Interim Heart of SHIMMER Title Tournament, making it to the final three-way match with Hyan and Kris Statlander ... Has battled serious talent (and won) with victories over Jazz, Jetta, Veda Scott, Mei Suruga, Jinny, and Alpha Female.



PHOTO BY ROB BRAZIER

**50. LAYNIE LUCK** (5'7", 152, 5, NL) Dominated the Midwestern indie scene during our evaluation period ... Reigning Zelo Pro Women's champion for over a year ... Defended her title successfully against such notable challengers as Brooke Valentine, Elayna Black, Marti Belle, Kylie Rae, and Shotzi Blackheart ... Faced Big Swole for the Phoenix of RISE title, but lost ... Also competed in a four-way for the FIRST Wrestling Uptown VFW title ... Memorably competed in intergender bouts against Project Monix, GPA, and AJ Gray ... Won the Freelance Underground Independent Title in a six-way against all male wrestlers ... Has fans completely "Turnt Up."



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD

**51. AMALE** (5'3", 141, 8, NL) WWE officially signed her on August 13 for its NXT U.K. brand ... She is the first-ever French woman wrestler to be signed by WWE ... Prior to being signed, she appeared on NXT U.K. five times, competing against talent like Jinny, Valkyrie, Xia Brookside, and Dani Luna ... Has defended the wXw Women's championship multiple times against wrestlers like LuFisto, Faye Jackson, Killer Kelly, Little Miss Roxxy, and Meiko Satomura ... Lost the Women of KULT title to Millie McKenzie at WrestlingKULT #14 ... Prior to WWE deal, a rising intergender star in Europe.



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**52. MILLIE MCKENZIE** (5'5", 128, 6, NL) At 20 years old, she has the resume of a wrestler who has been around a lot longer ... Held five titles, four of which she still holds, including the Women of KULT championship, REACH Women's title, Kamikaze Pro tag title, EVE tag team championship, and Sendai Girls tag team championship ... Competed in a RevPro Undisputed British Women's title match and lost to Jinny in a PROGRESS Women's title #1 contendership match ... Won the Riptide tag team tournament with Charli Evans, besting The Rascalz in the final ... Won the Ace of EVE tournament, beating Mercedes Martinez in the final.



PHOTO BY ROB BRAZIER



**53. NATALYA** (5'5", 135, 20, 7)

Remains a workhorse and reliable talent in her 12th year for WWE ... Competed in the first-ever women's match in Saudi Arabia against Lacey Evans ... Defeated Evans in the Hell in a Cell Kickoff show ... Competed for Team Raw at Survivor Series ... Teamed with Sarah Logan to face The Kabuki Warriors at WWE Tribute to the Troops ... Appeared in the Royal Rumble ... Took part in the women's Elimination Chamber match for the Raw Women's championship #1 contendership ... Defeated by Liv Morgan in the WrestleMania 36 Kickoff show, but beat her in a rematch this June.



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PHOTO BY YUICHI KOJIMA

**54. GIULIA** (5'4", 121, 3, NL)

London native enjoyed a breakout year in Ice Ribbon and World Wonder Ring Stardom ... Wrestled Hana Kimura to a time-limit draw at Stardom's Year-End Climax 2019 ... Defeated three competitors at last December's Goddesses of Stars event ... Competed in a dark match with Kimura against Arisa Hoshiki and Mayu Iwatani at NJPW Wrestle Kingdom 14 ... A challenger in the Kagetsu Gauntlet at Stardom New Year's Stars ... Won the Stardom Cinderella Tournament, then defeated Tam Nakano to capture the vacant Wonder of Stardom title this July ... Holds the Artists of Stardom championship with Maika and Syuri.

**55. ALEXIA NICOLE** (4'11", 103, 7, 94)

"The Bubblegum Princess" remains one of the top young indie wrestlers in Ontario ... Had multiple memorable showings for Impact Wrestling ... Though she primarily competes against other women, appeared in inter-gender matches at C4 Combat Shock and BW's 5 Years and Counting ... Lost a singles bout to Evil Uno in the former appearance ... Defeated Nicole Savoy for the vacant Femmes Fatales International championship ... Beat Jody Threat for the BW Women's Championship just before the COVID-19 shutdown in her native Canada.



PHOTO BY @SHOOTINGTHEINDIES

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**56. SONYA DEVILLE** (5'7", 130, 5, 60)

Finally pulled away from her best friend Mandy Rose and their tag team Fire & Desire to get a much-deserved singles push ... Teamed up with Miz and John Morrison several times on *Smackdown* to create some hilarious segments ... Competed in a Smackdown Women's title #1 contendership match ... Appeared in the Royal Rumble and had a spotlight moment with Rose ... Faced Rose in a Loser Leaves WWE no-DQ match at SummerSlam 2020 ... Her turn as a heel was (ironically) applauded by many fans ... Remains active as a positive voice for LGBTQ+ representation in wrestling.

**57. PEYTON ROYCE** (5'7", 132, 11, 49)

With Billie Kay, remained an amusing fixture on WWE's Raw brand ... The team unsuccessfully challenged for the Women's tag belts at Backlash and came out on the losing end of a feud with The Riott Squad ... With the recent dissolution of The Iiconics, seems poised to enjoy a successful singles run on *Raw* ... Defeated Kay in a one-on-one bout followed by a tearful embrace ... Apart from that victory, won singles bouts against Ruby Riott and Liv Morgan ... Previously a standout on the Australian independent scene, Royce originally trained with Madison Eagles.



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PHOTO BY CHRIS GRASSO

**58. ALLIE KAT** (5'3", 128, 5, NL)

One of the most popular stars of Game Changer Wrestling ... Lost to Nick Gage in a Texas Death Match for the GCW title ... Defeated Mance Warner at the promotion's Run Rickey Run event ... Competed in both Tournament of Survival 5 and Acid Cup 2 ... Lost to Jody Threat in a BW Women's championship match ... Took part in the Girl Fight 4 Tag Team Tournament ... Appeared in a dark match on Beyond Wrestling's *Uncharted Territory* television show and entered CHIKARA's King of Trios tournament ... Despite sometimes silly persona, has incredible work ethic and shows no fear.





## 59. **BILLIE KAY** (5'10", 132, 13, 57)

Remained one part of WWE's most popular comedic acts ... Purely entertaining backstage and during in-ring talking segments ... Competed in a Women's tag team triple-threat at Backlash, which was won by Bayley and Sasha Banks ... Lost to The Riott Squad at Payback 2020 ... Competed in a Smackdown Women's title #1 contendership battle royal ... Near the end of the evaluation period, she and Peyton Royce lost a match to The Riott Squad and were forced to disband ... In a small handful of singles outings, Kay scored wins over Ruby Riott and Nikki Cross.



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PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

## 60. **KIERA HOGAN** (4'11", 120, 5, 54)

Staple of Impact's Knockouts division ... Participated in the Empower tag team title four-way with Diamante ... Competed in the Call Your Shot Gauntlet at Bound For Glory ... Lost to Kylie Rae at Impact Wrestling's Rebellion 2020 ... Entered the Knockouts championship #1 contender's gauntlet at Slammiversary XVIII ... A standout in matches for nearly a dozen different promotions, including Queens of Combat and special events like Ladies Night Out 8 ... Antagonistic team with Tasha Steelz is faring quite well in a solid program with Havok and Nevaeh.



## 61. **CHARLI EVANS** (5'1", 143, 5, NL)

Won the Resurgence championship and EVE tag team title (with Millie McKenzie) during the evaluation period ... Continued her reign with the Good Wrestling Grand Prize and Pro Wrestling Subjective Women's titles ... Lost the Sendai Girls tag belts, which she held with McKenzie ... The team won Riptide's tag team tournament, beating The Rascalz in the final ... Challenged Team Sea Stars for the SHIMMER tag belts at SHIMMER Volume 116 ... Australia native continues to be a dominant force on the American and European indie circuits.



PHOTO BY NEW PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS

PHOTO BY NEW PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS

## 62. **SHAZZA MCKENZIE** (5'2", 138, 12, 38)

Competed on an episode of AEW Dark and was a fan favorite ... Stayed busy by competing for many promotions, including PWA Black Label and SHIMMER ... Defeated five women in a scramble match at SHIMMER Volume 117 ... Became #1 contender to the PWA heavyweight title at the Black Label Coliseum event, besting three men in a four-way match ... The belt has recently been held by only men, including Bronson Reed ... Unsuccessful against Cave-man Ugg in her eventual title shot ... Seemed ready to make a splash stateside, but the pandemic has kept her grounded in Australia.



## 63. **NAOMI** (5'5", 125, 11, 41)

Returned in the Women's Royal Rumble match after being out since July, but was summarily eliminated by Shayna Baszler ... Won a shot at the Smackdown Women's title belt by defeating Carmella ... Lost to Bayley in her championship opportunity at Super ShowDown 2020 in Saudi Arabia ... Lost to Sasha Banks in a Beat The Clock Challenge on Smackdown, but turned around and quickly defeated Bayley in a non-title bout ... Remains a fan favorite with an extremely passionate fan base ... #GiveNaomiAChance trended on Twitter and was even mentioned on Smackdown (later to become part of a storyline feud with Lacey Evans).



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## 64. **JINNY** (5'6", 128, 5, 45)

"The Fashionista" of NXT U.K. and current PROGRESS Women's champion continues to bring a touch of class and a blatant disregard for the rules to whichever ring she steps into ... Clashes with Piper Niven on WWE's British brand saw the two trade wins in singles and tag team outings, but it was in PROGRESS where the Londoner shone brightest ... Defeated the legendary Meiko Satomura at PROGRESS Chapter 99 to become a two-time Women's champion and went on to have successful defenses against Dani Luna, Gisele Shaw, and others ... Uses her long limbs to great effect in striking and submission scenarios.





## 65. **UTAMI HAYASHISHITA**

(5'5", 143, 2, 46) Second runner-up for last year's *PWI* Rookie of the Year award captured the Goddesses of Stardom championship with Saya Kamitani at Cinderella Summer and the Artist of Stardom title with AZM and Momo Watanabe at Goddesses of Stars 2019 ... Reigns as both the Future of Stardom champion and SWA Undisputed Women's champ ... Competed in a highly rated eight-person tag match at Cinderella Summer in Nagoya ... Fared less well in Stardom's Cinderella tournament, where she was eliminated in the semi-finals ... Still, the future remains bright for this young star known as the "Big Rookie."



PHOTO BY YUICHI KOJIMA

## 66. **ASHLEY VOX**

(5'3", 120, 6, NL) Competed in CHIKARA's annual King of Trios tournament ... Won the SHIMMER tag team title and the BCP tag team championship with "Sea Star" Delmi Exo ... The latter was captured in the final of an intergender tournament against The Ugly Ducklings ... Became a regular on-screen member of the NWA women's division on *Powerrr*, though mostly used as enhancement talent ... Wrestled for many promotions, such as SHIMMER, Beyond Wrestling, Limitless Wrestling, and SHINE ... Defeated Kris Statlander in a Last Creature Standing Match at Limitless Wrestling's Limitless Twilight Zone event ... Continued reign as Sabotage tag champs with Delmi Exo ... She and Exo are an increasingly popular tag team within the indie wrestling fandom.



PHOTO BY JON WASHER

## 67. **TASHA STEELZ**

(5'3", 150, 5, NL) Won the vacant Chaotic Wrestling Women's belt from Alisha Edwards at CW Breaking Point ... Continued her reign as BCP Icons champion ... Ultimately lost the Chaotic Wrestling Women's Championship to Skylar ... Debuted for NWA in December at Into The Fire, facing Thunder Rosa in a losing effort ... Made her return to Impact Wrestling in May where she unsuccessfully challenged Kylie Rae, but was quickly signed a day later ... Formed effective heel duo with Kiera Hogan ... They defeated Havok and Nevaeh in a no-DQ match ... Competed in the Knockouts title #1 contender's gauntlet at Impact Slammiversary XVIII.

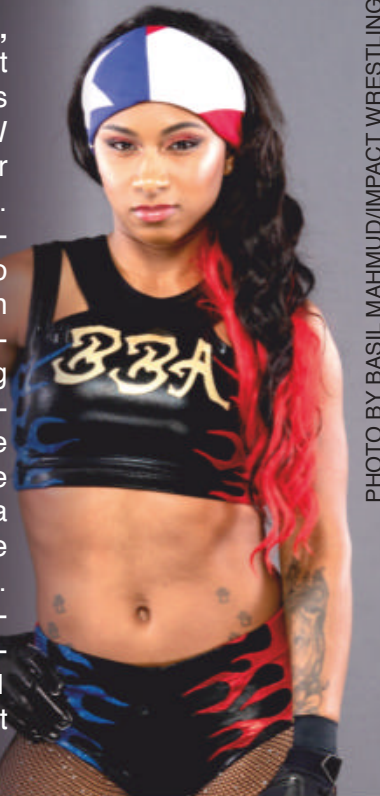


PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

## 68. **HIROYO MATSUMOTO**

(5'5", 154, 14, 3) Won the Sendai Girls tag team title as part of Reiwa Ultima Powers ... Also captured the Blast Queen championship ... Remains SEAdLINNNG Beyond the Sea tag champs with Yoshiko ... Won the Sendai Girls Royal Tag Tournament 2019 teaming with DASH Chisako ... Competed in several highly rated tag bouts for SEAdLINNNG ... Worked 61 matches in total, averaging out to almost two matches per week ... Competed in the HIRO'e Gauntlet at WAVE NAMI 1 that lasted nearly 44 minutes ... Participated in Kagetsu Gauntlet at Stardom's New Years Stars 2020 ... Remains a true workhorse across Japan.



©OZ ACADEMY

## 69. **NIA JAX**

(6', 262, 5, NL) Returned to a WWE ring this April after a long absence ... Destroyed Deonna Purrazzo on *Raw* after being out of action since April 2019 ... Qualified for the women's Money in the Bank match by defeating Kairi Sane, but failed to take home the coveted briefcase ... Gained a shot at the Raw Women's championship by defeating Charlotte Flair and Natalya in a triple-threat match ... Failed in two attempts to take the Raw Women's title from Asuka ... More recently, she and Shayna Baszler upset Bayley and Sasha Banks for the WWE Women's tag belts.



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## 70. **LEYLA HIRSCH**

(5'1", 120, 3, NL) Wrestled for top promotions worldwide, including Beyond Wrestling, wXw, and Stardom ... Lost to LuFisto in the thrilling final of wXw's 2019 Femmes Fatales tournament, after beating Sammii Jayne in the first round and Session Moth Martina in the semi-final ... Had a good performance in Stardom's High Speed Grand Prix, defeating Starlight Kid and AZM, only to lose to Death Yama-san ... Despite her momentum, failed to wear any gold during the period ... Did make an attempt by entering the Empower Title Tournament ... Following impressive outings as an intergender wrestler, ranked #473 in this year's *PWI* "500."

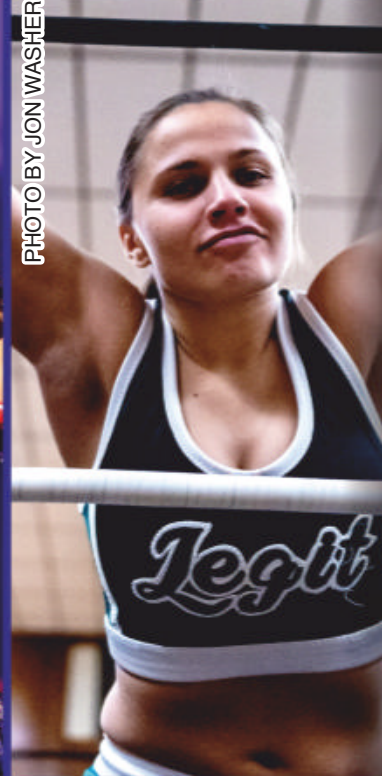


PHOTO BY JON WASHER



## 71. **HYAN** (5'5", 155, 6, NL)

Was named the Interim Heart of SHIMMER champ after besting Kris Statlander and Rhia O'Reilly in a triple-threat last fall ... Made an appearance for Impact with Miranda Alize, losing to Alex Gracia and AQA at Arlington Brawl & Fanfest ... Won a three-way against Christi Jaynes and Kenzie Paige at AAW's The Art of War 2020 ... Continued her reign as Sabotage champion, now spanning over two years ... Won the ROW Diamonds Division championship by defeating Alex Gracia at ROW Rise To Wrestling Royalty, then lost it in February to Rok-C at a TV taping.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD

## 72. **SOLO DARLING** (5'2", 12, NL)

Won the CHIKARA Campeonatos de Parejas with Willow Nightingale as The Bird And The Bee ... They'd be the last pair to hold that title ... Participated in King of Trios, but her team was eliminated by The Crucible ... Lost in the semi-finals of PTPW's tag team title tournament ... Memorably appeared at several Beyond Wrestling events, including Wear Sunscreen, Please Come Back 2020, and several episodes of IWTW's *Uncharted Territory* ... Won the Feast Championship Wrestling title at Americanrana 2019 ... Frequently accompanied to the ring by faithful canine companion Officer Magnum, who is a very good boy.



PHOTO BY JON WASHER

## 73. **MARCELA** (5'1", 132, 34, NL)

Continued her reign as the CMLL Women's champion (her fifth reign), and has held it for nearly two years ... Defended the celebrated title in a best-of-three-falls match, in which she defeated Dalys la Caribena ... Is still thriving at almost 50 years old, boasting 34 years of experience ... Competed in a Hair vs. Mask six-way match at Lucha Strong ... Thankfully escaped that bout with her long locks intact ... Was inactive for about three months near the end of 2019 ... Though loyal to her home promotion of CMLL, she's traveled to compete in Japan in the past.



PHOTO BY BLACK TERRY, JR.



COURTESY OF MADDISON MILES

## 74. **MADDISON MILES** (5'5", 140, 5, 93)

Remained the DOA U.K. Women's Champion, holding the title for over a year ... Won the RPW Queen of the Ring tournament, defeating Lizzy Evo in the final ... Challenged for the RevPro Undisputed British Women's title, but lost to the defending Zoe Lucas ... Reached the finals of the Bellatrix Queen of the Ring tournament, where she fell to Dominita ... Also competed in the final of the 2019 Adrenaline Cup in an intergender four-way match ... Ultimately lost to Dexter ... Though she only wrestled in four months of our evaluation period, Miles managed to compete in 25 matches.

## 75. **DELMÍ EXO** (5'7", 155, 5, NL)

Won several titles with Ashley Vox as Team Sea Stars, most notably in SHIMMER ... Remained the reigning Sabotage and WSU tag team champion (the latter with Kasey Catal) ... Visited Japan in 2020 and wrestled a memorable tour there ... Outside wrestling, she's been successful as a bodybuilder, placing 2nd in Bikini Open and 3rd in Bikini Novice at the 2019 NPC East Coast Cup ... Known as "One Of The Boys," Exo ranked #477 in the PWI "500" for her stellar work in intergender wrestling.



PHOTO BY JESSICA LYNN



PHOTO BY BLACK TERRY, JR.

## 76. **LADY MARAVILLA** (5'5", 139, 11, 81)

Continued her reign as the AAA Mixed Tag Team champion (with Villano III Jr.) ... Has wrestled mostly within AAA, but had a breakout appearance on Impact Wrestling Xplosion, losing to Keyra ... Participated in the AAA Lucha Fighter Female Tournament, where she was eliminated by Lady Shani in the semi-final ... Lost a bloody Hair vs. Hair Match against Big Mami at AAA's Guerra de Titanes 2019 ... Though only 26 years old, Maravilla has already made quite an impression in both the U.S. and her native Mexico with a little help from her thrilling (though admittedly risky) aerial style.



## 77. **NICOLE MATTHEWS** (5'8", 145, 14, 74)

Lost the ECCW Women's championship to Bambi Hall in October at Halloween Hell 2019 ... Tried to regain the title in a six-way TLC match at ECCW Ballroom Brawl, but was ultimately defeated by Christina Von Eerie ... She won a six-way elimination match at PPW Fall for Fall ... Competed regularly as the only woman in inter-gender matches with all men ... Since travel restriction keeping her from entering the U.S. has been in effect since 2018, her ability to gain traction outside her native Canada has been seriously stunted.



PHOTO BY RAY URNER

## 78. **SYURI** (5'5", 128, 11, NL)

Won the Artist of Stardom championship as part of team Donna del Mondo, one of the promotion's top factions ... Took part in the 5STAR Grand Prix 2020 and the Ice Ribbon 2nd Kizuna Tournament with Tae Honma, being eliminated from the latter after a first round time-limit draw ... Challenged MISSION K4 for the OZ Academy tag team title last December ... Took part in Sendai Girls' Royal Tag Tournament 2019 with Meiko Satomura, but lost in the semi-finals to Chihiro Hashimoto and Yuu ... Defeated by Giulia in the semi-finals of Stardom's Cinderella Tournament.



PHOTO BY YUICHI KOJIMA

## 79. **ZOE LUCAS** (5'8", 140, 5, 86)

Self-professed "Beauty Queen" lost RevPro Undisputed British Women's championship to Gisele Shaw at High Stakes 2020 after an almost two-year reign ... Wrestled Jinny to a time-limit draw at EVE's Battle Cry in January ... Took part in the Goddesses of Stardom Tag League 2019, competing for Tokyo Cyber Squad with Bobbi Tyler ... Defeated Rebel Kinney at EVE's Women Behaving Badly in March ... Participated in the 12-person match at Stardom Mask Fiesta 2019 as "Monster Z. Sullivan" ... Remains one of the top heels in RevPro.

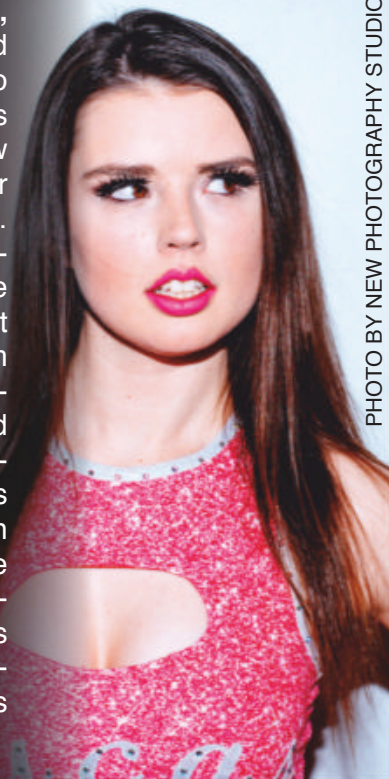


PHOTO BY NEW PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS

## 80. **KC SPINELLI** (5'8", 144, 11, 88)

Reigning APW Women's champion for three years with 10 successful defenses ... Lost at Femmes Fatales 23 to Meave O'Farrell ... Defeated Nicole Matthews and Scarlett Black in the PPW Championship Tournament in November ... Beat Jessie Mack in a streetfight to retain the APW Women's title ... Challenged Lincoln Steen in an ECPW Celtic Roots title match at Autumn Aggression 2019, which she won by DQ ... Was poised to have a great year before COVID-19 caused Canadian promotions to shut down ... Still has great years ahead of her.



PHOTO BY GILDA PASQUIL

## 81. **DAVIENNE** (5'5", 170, 7, NL)

Versatile New England native spent our entire evaluation period as WSU Spirit Champion after defeating Kris Statlander for the title in September 2019 ... With Ava Everett in Queens of Combat she was a perennial title challenger but failed to bring home gold in a QOC tag team title match at the imaginatively titled "Halloqueen Havoc" ... Rivalry with Team Sea Stars carried through various promotions including Limitless Wrestling and SHIMMER ... Also lost a rare singles match in SHIMMER to Saraya Knight on November 3 ... Willingness to mix it up with men produced plenty of inter-gender victories, too.



PHOTO BY HARRY AARON

## 82. **SESSION MOTH MARTINA** (5'5", 130, 9, NL)

Globe-trotting Irish veteran reached the semi-finals of the WXW Femme Fatales Tournament in Germany before heading to Japan for considerable success in Stardom as part of the Oedo Tai faction ... On home soil, was a constant threat to the OTT Women's title while maintaining her intergender wrestling reputation by taking on Mark Haskins on February 1 in Dublin ... Scored a huge win over Sumie Sakai at Ring of Honor's Free Enterprise show before COVID-19 restrictions curtailed what could have been a breakout year state-side ... Closure of pubs in Ireland surely only added to the disappointment for the hard-partying Session Moth.



PHOTO BY ROB BRAZIER



### 83. **INDI HARTWELL** (5'9", 139, 4, NL) "Impressive"

Indi has indeed been wowing many through her NXT endeavors ... Bouts against Mia Yim, Tegan Nox, and Shotzi Blackheart on Wednesday nights have showcased what the 24-year-old Aussie is capable of, with a victory over Blackheart being the high point ... A one-off outing against Shayna Baszler on the April 20 edition of *Raw* was less impressive, but one has to admire her fortitude for accepting the challenge ... Has a fine arsenal of power moves she likes to utilize, and, with a little more seasoning, could be a real contender for the NXT Women's title down the road.



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### 84. **LIV MORGAN** (5'3", 117, 5, 70) Former

Riott Squad member takes a 14-place drop in our rankings, largely due to a long hiatus from WWE at the end of 2019 ... Was reintroduced to audiences through a series of cryptic vignettes that promised a "different" Liv from the spunky Jersey girl we were accustomed to ... Returned on the December 30 *Raw* to interrupt the Lana and Lashley wedding ceremony and profess her unrequited love for Lana ... This led to a brawl between the two and subsequent victories for Morgan on TV ... Matches against Ruby Riott led to a rekindled friendship between the two.



### 85. **GISELE SHAW** (5'7", 130, 5, 92) Storm Wrestling Academy graduate likes to

ply her trade in the U.K. and Ireland, which seems to be working out well as she held multiple championships there including the Pro Wrestling EVE tag team championship and the RevPro Undisputed British Women's title ... In RevPro, scored an impressive trio of victories over Mercedes Martinez, Tessa Blanchard, and Taya Valkyrie during our evaluation period, which surely must have caught the attention of promoters in the U.S. ... Pays homage to Canadian legends Trish Stratus and Gail Kim by repurposing moves like the Chick Kick and Eat Defeat to great success.



PHOTO BY JAMES MUSSELWHITE

PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ

### 86. **TRISH ADORA** (5'9", 175, 4, NL) Former

rugby player and U.S. Army veteran has been trailblazing her way across the independent scene ... Scored a three-way victory over Amy Rose and Portia on an MCW/ROH Future of Honor show in Maryland ... Pushed Impact Wrestling's Tasha Steelz to a double count-out on a Prime Time Pro Wrestling card ... Wrestled almost as many men as women during our evaluation period, earning a spot in the *PWI* "500" ... Crowning achievement for "The Afro Punk" was becoming the first ever Pan-African World Diaspora champ in her hometown of Washington D.C. ... Has proudly defended that title ever since.



### 87. **DANI LUNA** (5'4", 139, 4, NL) Charismatic

Croydon, England, native burst onto the NXT U.K. scene in early 2020 and gained instant fan support by standing up to the bullying antics of Jinny and Kay Lee Ray ... Prior to this, carved out a name for herself taking on both women and men all across the U.K. and ended our evaluation period holding three different women's titles on the British independent scene ... Scored a big win over Toni Storm at PROGRESS Chapter 96, but came up short in subsequent title matches against Meiko Satomura and Jinny ... No doubt improved her game in the process.



PHOTO BY ROB BRAZIER

PHOTO BY JERRY VILLAGRANA

### 88. **LADY SHANI** (5'5", 163, 11, 40) Former

AAA Reina de Reinas Champion drops in our rankings after losing the title but did score plenty of victories during our evaluation period, mainly in multi-person tag team matches ... Singles career got back on track in 2020 with the highlight being wins over Faby Apache, Lady Maravilla, and La Hiedra all on the same night to win the female bracket of the AAA Lucha Fighter Tournament ... Masked and tattooed luchadora utilizes an array of huracanranas and planchas that can put away an opponent at any time ... Remains a constant threat to anyone who faces her.





**89. KILLER KELLY** (5'4", 134, 4, NL)

Portuguese woman-of-war is a mainstay of Germany's WXW, where she scored a big win over Leyla Hirsch to begin our evaluation period ... At WXW's 19th Anniversary show in Oberhausen, won a fatal four-way against Baby Allison, Little Miss Roxxy, and Skye Smitson ... Fell short in a #1 contender match against Melanie Gray two months later ... Lost NXT U.K. TV bouts to Isla Dawn and Toni Storm ... Parted ways with WWE a short time later, which should help her burgeoning independent career ... Only a few years into her career, she ranks among the toughest women in European wrestling.



PHOTO BY ROB BRAZIER

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**90. NINA SAMUELS** (5'7", 150, 6, NL)

Powerhouse Brit split her time mainly between Pro Wrestling EVE and NXT U.K. ... Picked up more losses in both than she may have liked ... Fell to Rhea Ripley, Xia Brookside, and Aoife Valkyrie on NXT U.K. TV, but landed victories over Lana Austin and Natalie Sykes in EVE ... Former EVE champion's signature moves include the Gory Special and missile dropkick ... She'll need to start using both more effectively if she hopes to return to a championship level in either of her home promotions ... Comfortable in most any role, but fares especially well as an antagonist.

**91. JESSICA TROY** (5'6", 132, 65, NL)

Australian ace captured the PWWA championship in her home country prior to our evaluation period and went on to hold it for the duration, following in the footsteps of former champions like Madison Eagles and Jessie McKay (Billie Kay) ... Steel cage victory over Steph De Lander in PWA Black Label was the blow-off to a violent feud ... Competed in less violent (though memorable) intergender bout with Orange Cassidy in Sydney ... Delighted SHIMMER fans as part of her tag team with Charli Evans ... The two had a high-profile match against champs Team Sea Stars at SHIMMER Volume 116.



PHOTO BY NEW PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS

PHOTO BY NEW PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS



**92. CANDY LEE** (6'1", 188, 4, NL)

Two-time IPW New Zealand Women's champ captured the title last December and held it through this summer ... Her first IPW:NZ title win, back in 2017, was the first by an openly transgender wrestler in a major indie promotion ... Last fall, Lee scored two wins over Jamie Senegal in Illinois: one at a RISE PPV and another at SHIMMER's Volume 116 taping ... COVID-19 postponed her plans to become a breakout star in the U.S. ... Beloved on Twitter for her lively personality, sense of humor, and reclamation of the term "Diva" ... Might be Kelly Kelly's biggest fan.

**93. JODY THREAT** (5'4", 160, 3, 99)

With skater skills to rival those of Darby Allin, Ontario's "Wild Child" had a banner year on the Canadian independent scene where she held three different promotions' women's titles and defeated the likes of KC Spinelli, Kylie Rae and Jordynne Grace in the process ... Alongside Allie Kat, won the Terry Ann Gibson Memorial tournament in C4 Wrestling as part of their fabulously named "Punk Rock Pussycats" team ... Showed real punk rock attitude by taking on Rickey Shane Page and John Silver in intergender matches ... Loves to put opponents away with her "Gnarly Bomb" torture rack bomb.



PHOTO BY @SHOOTINGTHEINDIES

PHOTO BY HARRY AARON



**94. WILLOW NIGHTINGALE** (5'6", 5, NL)

Long Island, New Yorker achieved singles glory in January 2020, defeating Tina San Antonio for the NYWC Starlet title in New York City before dropping it back a month later ... Most notable success still came as part of "The Bird And The Bee" tandem with Solo Darling ... The team defeated Tony Deppen and Travis Huckabee to raise the CHIKARA Campeonatos de Parejas title, which they retained until the promotion's closure ... Made appearances in SHIMMER alongside Darling, where they came close to dethroning Team Sea Stars for the tag team title at SHIMMER Volume 117.



**95. VEDA SCOTT** (5'1", 124, 9, 98) World traveler stepped into the ring everywhere from Denmark to Denver before stepping behind the announce desk for AEW's Women's Tag Team Cup tournament ... Scored a three-way victory over Ashley Vox and Nevaeh at Femme Fatales 23 and a singles win over Laynie Luck in SHIMMER ... Found a quirky kindred spirit in Kylie Rae and teamed up to beat Jody Threat and Allie Kat in A1 wrestling ... Law school graduate is as smart and versatile as any woman in wrestling, which is surely something that attracted AEW and could make her a major player in the future.



PHOTO BY JAYLEE PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

**96. MARTI BELLE** (5'4", 130, 12, NL) Former Impact Wrestling Knockout returns to our list after a four year absence thanks to strong showings in SHIMMER and its sister promotion SHINE ... Bagged the SHINE tag team title with BTY (Better than You) partner Jayme Jameson on January 18 by defeating Big Swole and Aja Perera in Fern Park, Florida ... Highest-profile appearances were in the revamped NWA where she aligned herself with Melina and Thunder Rosa, picking up victories in singles and tag team matches as well as running interference for her stablemates ... Johnny Rodz-trained New Yorker is as tough as she is savvy.



**97. HEATHER MONROE** (5'5", 130, 5, NL) Familiar face on the West Coast scene got some national exposure with an appearance on the August 12 edition of AEW *Dynamite* in a losing effort to Hikaru Shida ... Found herself embroiled in a bitter feud with Lacey Ryan in Championship Wrestling From Hollywood that saw her victorious in a best-of-three-falls match that did little to quell the animosity ... Traveled across California and Texas, picking up wins over a diverse range of opponents including Priscilla Kelly and Gino Medina ... Confident performer has made appearances for WWE, Impact Wrestling, and ROH in her young career.



PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

PHOTO BY MARK JOHNSTON

**98. HOLIDEAD** (5'8", 175, 5, 95) The "Twisted Sister" of Thunder Rosa might not have had the year her former partner had but was plenty successful in her own right ... Racked up frequent flyer miles with trips to Canada (where she has held the Crossfire Wrestling Women's belt since April 2019) and to the U.K. where she came close to defeating Sammii Jayne for the Pro Wrestling EVE International title ... SHIMMER appearances included a win over Veda Scott and a loss to future NXT star Shotzi Blackheart ... Spooky competitor can knock the soul right out of opponents with crushing blows and devastating power maneuvers.



**99. ELAYNA BLACK** (5'7", 2, NL) Appeared on *Impact Wrestling*, losing to Jessicka Havok, in October ... Competed in a Zelo Pro Women's title match at Journey Pro/Zelo Pro Kingdom Come, but was defeated by the defending champ Laynie Luck ... Challenged for the vacant HOW Women's title in a four-way bout, which was won by Taya Valkyrie ... Made her GCW debut in a deathmatch against Jimmy Lloyd ... Unsuccessfully vied for MAW tag title against Kara Noia and Sebastian Taylor ... Has hustled and appeared in myriad promotions in her short career, including notable outfits like SHIMMER, Freelance Underground, Warrior Wrestling, and RISE.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD

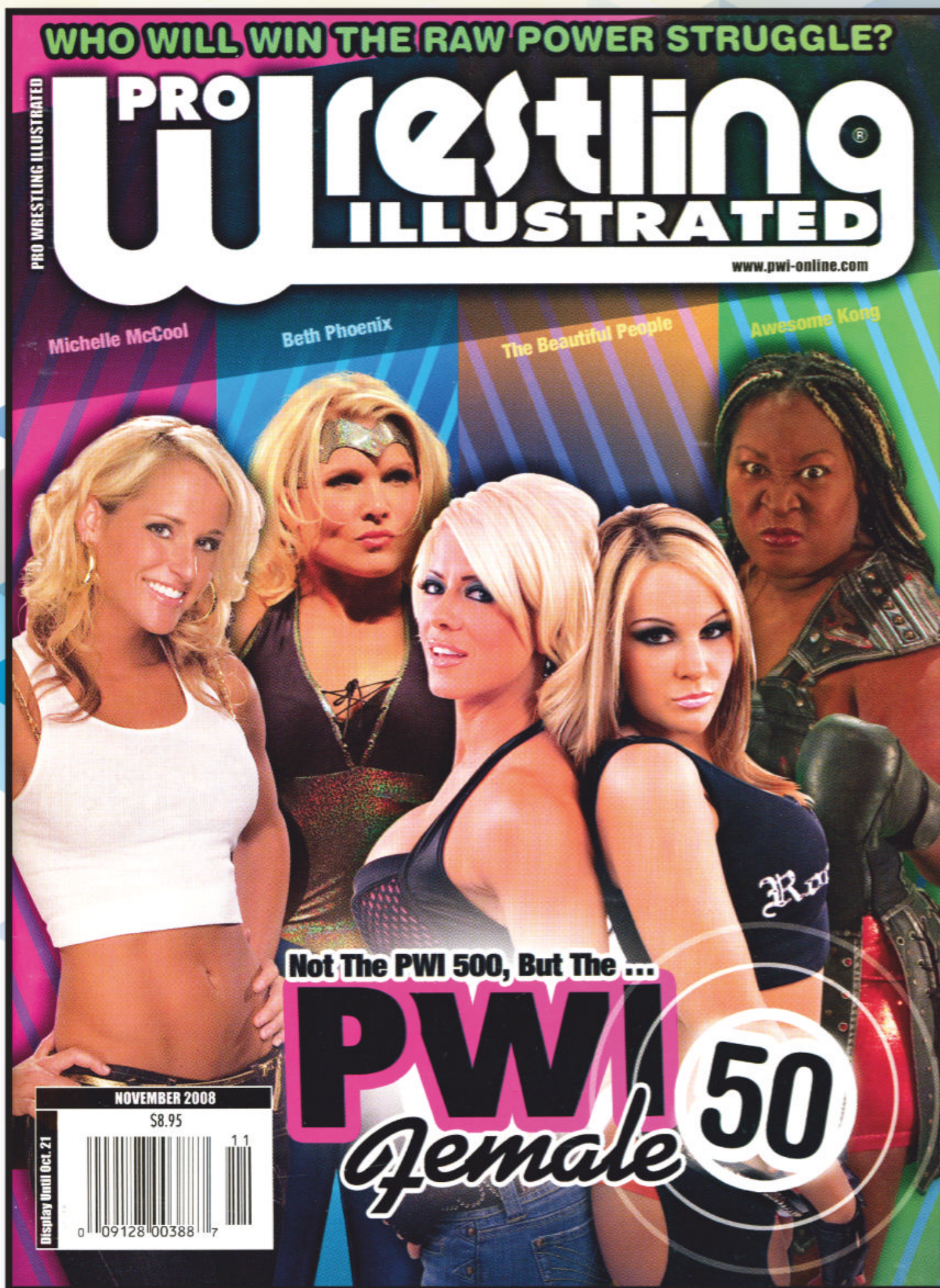
PHOTO BY CHRIS GRASSO

**100. MAX THE IMPALER** (5'10", 210, 2, NL) Intimidating Dayton, Ohio, native had a 95-day reign as OVW Women's champion during our evaluation period after lifting the title from Megan Bayne ... Defeated Bayne in a cage match at OVW's Christmas Chaos show and had similar hardcore wars against opponents through the Midwest and Canadian independent scenes ... Reached the semi-final of the CHIKARA Young Lions Cup before falling to Ricky South ... Proved that, when it came to hurting opponents, gender was not a factor ... Powerhouse performer often partners with Leon Scott as part of "The Wasteland Warriors" team.





# FROM THE VAULT



The "Women's 100" traces its origins to the *PWI* "Female 50," which was first published in 2008 as a way to recognize the growing popularity of women's wrestling. Awesome Kong topped the list in its first year.

*PWI* Trivia: As of 2020, the only women to appear on every "Female 50/Women's 100" are Natalya and LuFisto.



# WOMEN'S 100 ALPHABETICAL LISTING

86	Trish Adora	12	Jordynne Grace	87	Dani Luna	16	Nyla Rose
58	Allie Kat	83	Indi Hartwell	2	Becky Lynch	42	Rosemary
51	Amale	33	Jessicka Havok	76	Lady Maravilla	57	Peyton Royce
3	Asuka	65	Utami Hayashishita	73	Marcela	90	Nina Samuels
22	Britt Baker	47	Jamie Hayter	29	Mercedes Martinez	21	Kairi Sane
5	Sasha Banks	70	Leyla Hirsch	68	Hiroyo Matsumoto	40	Nicole Savoy
13	Shayna Baszler	60	Kiera Hogan	77	Nicole Matthews	95	Veda Scott
1	Bayley	98	Holidead	100	Max The Impaler	82	Session Moth Martina
23	Bianca Belair	71	Hyan	52	Millie McKenzie	88	Lady Shani
96	Marti Belle	31	Ivelisse	62	Shazza McKenzie	85	Gisele Shaw
39	Big Swole	10	Mayu Iwatani	74	Maddison Miles	6	Hikaru Shida
99	Elayna Black	41	Faye Jackson	97	Heather Monroe	9	Io Shirai
46	Shotzi Blackheart	69	Nia Jax	84	Liv Morgan	80	KC Spinelli
7	Tessa Blanchard	64	Jinny	63	Naomi	32	Kris Statlander
27	Alexa Bliss	24	Dakota Kai	53	Natalya	67	Tasha Steelz
20	Nikki Cross	25	Allysin Kay	55	Alexia Nicole	45	Toni Storm
72	Solo Darling	59	Billie Kay	94	Willow Nightingale	78	Syuri
81	Davienne	38	Killer Kelly	26	Tegan Nox	93	Jody Threat
56	Sonya Deville	89	Priscilla Kelly	49	Rhia O'Reilly	14	Thunder Rosa
61	Charli Evans	92	Candy Lee	37	Bea Priestley	91	Jessica Troy
43	Lacey Evans	15	Kimber Lee	30	Deonna Purrazzo	17	Taya Valkyrie
75	Delmi Exo	34	Candice LeRae	19	Kylie Rae	66	Ashley Vox
4	Charlotte Flair	79	Zoe Lucas	18	Kay Lee Ray	28	Momo Watanabe
48	Penelope Ford	50	Laynie Luck	8	Riho	36	Mia Yim
54	Giulia	35	LuFisto	11	Rhea Ripley	44	Su Yung



# HANA KIMURA:

## A TESTAMENT TO WOMEN'S WRESTLING

TEXT BY KRISTEN ASHLY

**O**N MAY 23, 2020, Japanese professional wrestler Hana Kimura was found dead by suicide in her Tokyo apartment, after being harassed by viewers of *Terrace House* (a reality show in which she starred) via social media.

Fuji TV canceled the rest of *Terrace House*'s current season as the wrestling industry rallied around Kimura and her memory. AEW paid tribute to her during Double or Nothing. And, on the September 3 episode of *Dynamite*—what would have been her 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday—Kenny Omega wore a Kimura t-shirt.

Io Shirai and Mauro Ranallo both paid respects to Kimura on the May 27 episode of *NXT*. On *Smackdown* two nights later, Sasha Banks wore a black armband with “HANA” written on it. Dakota Kai dyed her hair pink as an homage to Kimura for *NXT TakeOver: In Your House*.

World Wonder Ring Stardom, during its first event since the start of the pandemic, held a moment of silence, followed by 10 bell rings, in honor of the late wrestler.

Kimura was well-loved and respected in the wrestling community because of the kindness she showed everyone she met. Session Moth Martina worked with the young wrestler in Stardom from 2019 until the beginning of 2020, and shared with *PWI* how kind Kimura was to her from the start. “Hana was a natural superstar, set to take over the world,” Martina said. “She lit up every room she entered and had a smile on her face every time you spoke to her. She was the first person to welcome me to Japan. And it will never ever be the same without her, but we will never, ever lose her presence there.”

At 22 years old, Kimura had already built a legacy through pure talent and strength of character. Her mother is Kyoko Kimura, a former wrestler, and Hana wasted zero time in following in her footsteps—debuting as a professional wrestler when she was still a teen. In only four years, she built an impressive resume while leaving an indelible impression on audiences across the globe.

Hana Kimura was a two-time Artist of Stardom champion and held the Goddesses of Stardom

championship with Kagetsu for nearly an entire year, while also wowing fans of promotions like DDT and Ring of Honor. In 2019, she won the Stardom 5STAR Grand Prix, the Stardom Fighting Spirit Award, and ranked #61 on the *PWI* “Women’s 100.”

Through 315 matches in only 48 months, Kimura plied her trade for Stardom, Sendai Girls’ Pro Wrestling, Pro Wrestling: EVE, Ring of Honor, and KAOZ Lucha Libre. In a monumental moment for women’s wrestling, she competed in a dark match with Giulia against Arisa Hoshiki and Mayu Iwatani at New Japan’s Wrestle Kingdom 14 at the Tokyo Dome.

Prior to her tragic passing, Kimura’s success seemed both inevitable and imminent. It was apparent from not only her wrestling abilities, but her undeniable charisma and personality, that she had all the makings of an international superstar. Though her life cut was short by tragedy, her legacy will shine far. And her brief career will stand as a testament to what women’s wrestling can be. ■

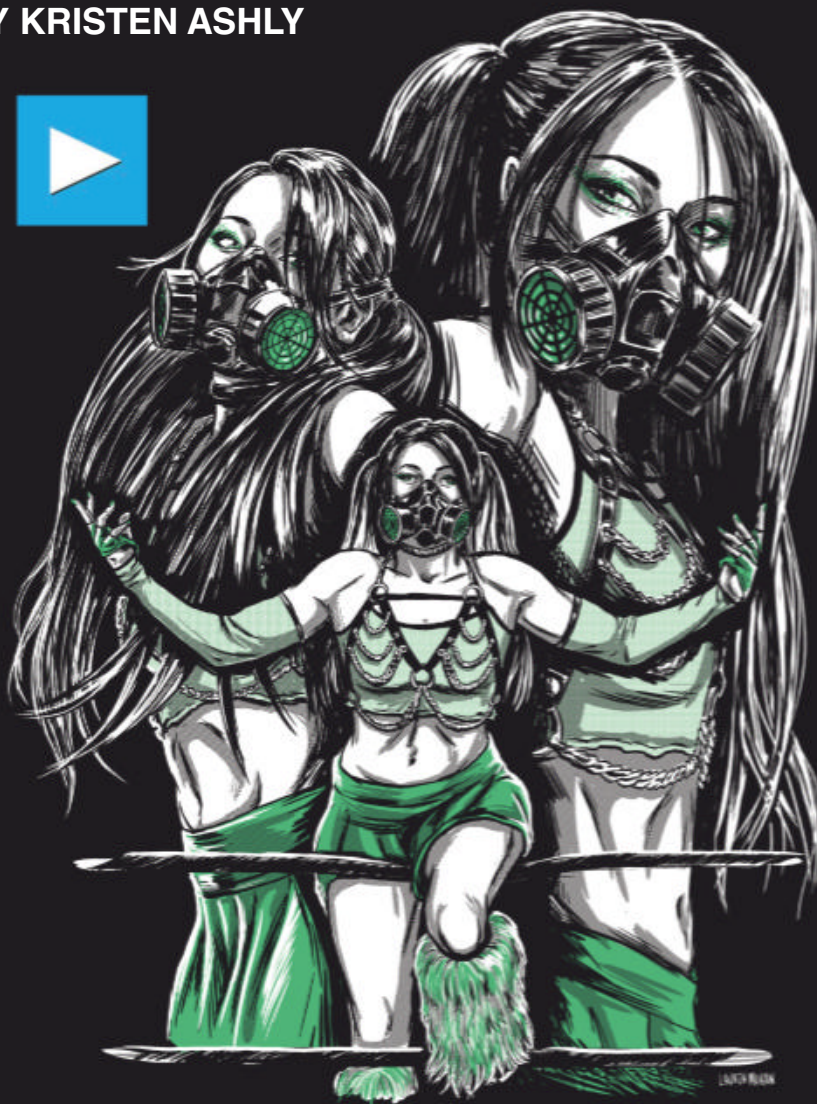


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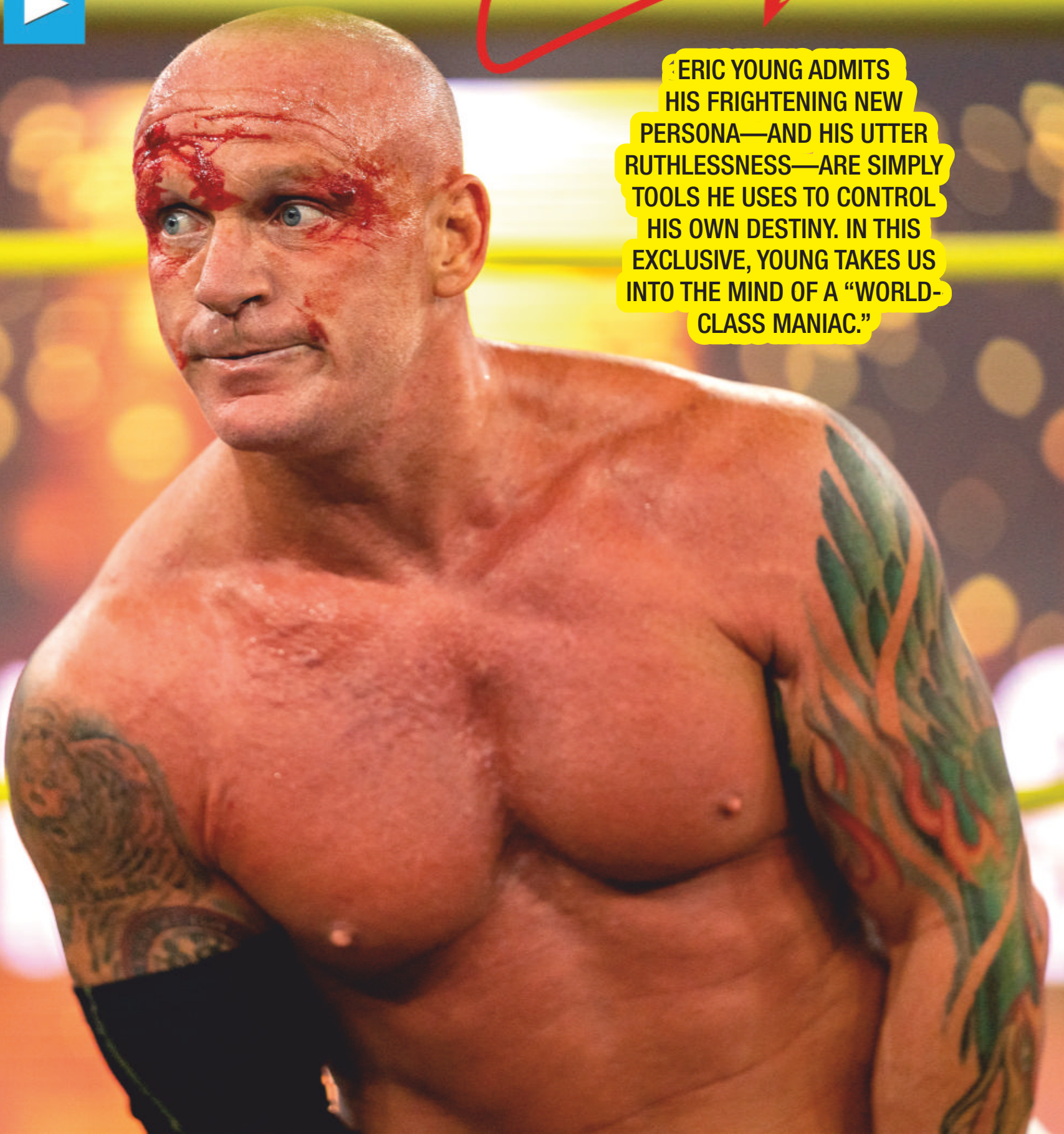


# NECESSARY

HOW **ERIC YOUNG** JUSTIFIES  
BEING PURE EVIL



ERIC YOUNG ADMITS HIS FRIGHTENING NEW PERSONA—AND HIS UTTER RUTHLESSNESS—ARE SIMPLY TOOLS HE USES TO CONTROL HIS OWN DESTINY. IN THIS EXCLUSIVE, YOUNG TAKES US INTO THE MIND OF A “WORLD-CLASS MANIAC.”





# MEANNESS

TEXT BY HARRY BURKETT

**I**'M TRYING TO win, I'm trying to hurt people, to eliminate threats," explained Eric Young, giving a calm, calculated analysis of his dangerous new persona and rationalizing the heinous acts he's committed since returning to Impact Wrestling. "Beating a person one-two-three, allowing them to come back in a week and challenge me again, that's not smart. I'd be setting myself up for disaster. I don't want to hurt the same person over and over again, just hurt them bad once and never see them again. It's not personal."

Now it may be appropriate to mention the word "sociopath." Here is the classic definition from *Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary*: "One who suffers from a mental disorder that causes a lack of moral restraint or responsibility toward fellow members of society."

Young embraces a new moniker, that of "World-Class Maniac." Yet that nickname doesn't do Young justice. That implies a lack of control. The alarming aspect

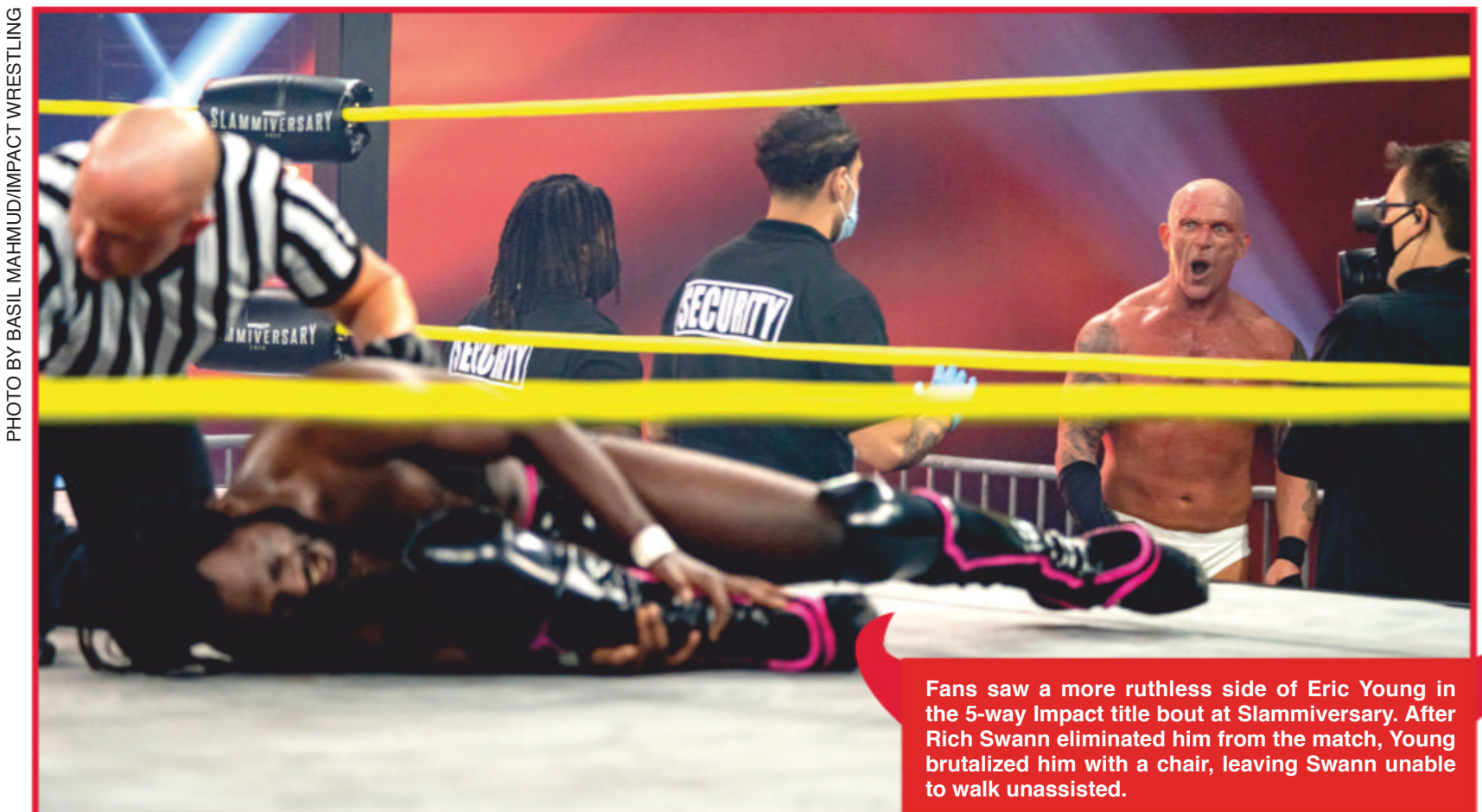
of Young's transformation is that he is incredibly disciplined with a well-planned strategy.

Call it his "Sociopath To Greatness Plan."

He implemented the first phase upon his return at Slammiversary, where he was the surprise participant in a five-way match—also involving Eddie Edwards, Rich Swann, Ace Austin, and Trey—for the Impact championship, which had been stripped from Tessa Blanchard due to her failure to appear at the company's TV tapings. Young made quick work of Trey, but was soon eliminated by Swann. Edwards went on to claim the Impact title.

It was then we saw what the new E.Y. was all about. Young attacked Swann with a steel chair, severely injuring his knee. It was a shocking display by a man who had been warmly welcomed back home to the company he helped build . . . and who ravaged his own homecoming. Soon after, Swann announced his retirement.

Edwards became the new target. But he tried to go about his business, establishing himself as a solid



Fans saw a more ruthless side of Eric Young in the 5-way Impact title bout at Slammiversary. After Rich Swann eliminated him from the match, Young brutalized him with a chair, leaving Swann unable to walk unassisted.



babyface champion. Edwards announced he would defend the Impact title every week. In July and August, he retained the title against Brian Myers, Sami Callihan, Trey, and Rob Van Dam.

Even close friends believed Edwards was overcompensating for perceived shortcomings during his first title reign in 2016-17. Others said Edwards was actually lowering the value of the championship by defending it every week like a TV title. Don Callis, a supporter of Edwards, noted this was a foolhardy mindset.

Eric Young watched from a distance, remembering his own title reign in 2014. So many parallels. The traditional babyface taking on the world. Somehow, being a fighting champion who burned out within a matter of weeks was considered more important than staying power.

Young's title reign had ended in 70 days. Edwards' previous reign ended in 97 days.

While Edwards doubled down on the approach that brought his first reign to a premature conclusion, Young knew he wouldn't make the same mistakes.



E.Y. nails poor Tommy Dreamer with a low-blow. Since returning to Impact, Young has made it clear he'll stop at nothing to get what he wants.

PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING/RESERVED

"I had a very similar mindset to Eddie's, seeing myself as the standard-bearer for the TNA brand, carrying the load and tons of responsibilities, which means more than just showing up for a match as champion," said Young about his rival, almost sympathetically. "Eddie had the mindset that he was going to take on all comers and represent the company. And that's all well and good for him, but the reality is that it *wasn't* good for him. That's something he learned the hard way."

Indeed, Edwards did. On August 15, at Impact Wrestling's TV tapings, Young beat Edwards in 12 minutes—ending his second title reign at only 28 days.

"With this being my second go as champion, I know the pitfalls . . . because I fell into them," said Young. "What's important to me is having power and having control, and the only way to do that is to hold the championship as the top performer and athlete in the company. That's where the power lies, and I don't intend to lose it. I'm in a very precarious position because I let that power and notoriety slip away before, and I don't intend to go on that ride ever again."

Young went on another rampage, injuring Edwards' knee to put him on the disabled list. He subsequently targeted Edwards' wife, Alisha, and his friend, Tommy Dreamer.

Yet even the most cold-blooded of plans can go awry. Rich Swann didn't stay retired, insisting that he would be healed up enough to challenge Young for the Impact title at Bound for

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Eric Young never quite found his stride on WWE's main roster—though, in all fairness, he wasn't given much time to make a meaningful impression.





When Young captured the TNA World Heavyweight title in April 2014 (above), it was a feel-good moment for a perennial underdog. But his willingness to be a fighting champion led E.Y. to a shorter reign than he would've liked. This time out, he's taking no chances.



Glory. Impact Executive Vice President Scott D'Amore reluctantly granted Swann his wish.

Young will be forced to find his inner evil again. And he's looking to some troubling cinematic figures for inspiration.

"It's an out-of-body experience," he said. "I tap into *Natural Born Killers* or Robert De Niro in *Taxi Driver*—that feeling of acute paranoia, feeling your back is against the wall. People are animals, and animals choose fight-or-flight to survive. At this point of my career, I choose to fight. In a violent world, the only way to be on top is to be the most violent—that's how Eric Young looks at it. Mike Tyson and Ronda Rousey were winning fights before they ever started. Eventually, the legend of what I'm willing to do will precede me. That's a big advantage."

The Impact champion describes himself as "experiential," meaning he learns from his experi-

ences. So, it's not that he's scarred or traumatized. Young cites his four-year run in WWE and his furlough—along with 30 other stars—during this spring's COVID-19 pandemic. Young insists he's not bitter, but he has certainly internalized the experience.

"Most of my time with NXT was amazing," said Young. "I still talk to Hunter, and we're still friends. He did a lot for me, both personally and professionally, by allowing me to be part of his team. The main roster was not what I hoped for.

I'm not the first person that Vince McMahon missed on, and I won't be the last. It's nothing personal. If anyone should be upset, it's him. Missing my potential is one of the biggest mistakes he's ever made. I've been a WWE fan since I was three, so I know he has way more wins than losses. But, if you can't find 10 minutes for me on a professional wrestling show that's three hours long, then you've failed as a leader of that product and as leader of that locker room."

Young has enjoyed enough triumphs in the business to be confident in his abilities—yet he's missed enough opportunities that he's determined to never let them slip away again.


We've seen E.Y. as a jobber, the silent member of Team Canada, "Super Eric," the ruthless leader of the World Elite, ODB's love interest, TNA World champion, and the leader of Sanity in NXT. Now he's the "World-Class Maniac," obsessed with the Impact championship.

The scary part? As Young says, "This is *me*—in my purest form!" □



Young decimates Eddie Edwards with a neckbreaker on the hardest part of the ring. He's come so far from the affable "Super Eric" who wanted nothing more than to put smiles on fans' faces.



A full-page photograph of a man with short blonde hair and a light beard, wearing aviator sunglasses. He is wearing a white t-shirt with a graphic of his own face and light blue jeans with large tears at the knees. There are red splatters, resembling blood, on his t-shirt and jeans. He is standing in front of a dark background with large, stylized yellow handprints. A white fence is visible at the bottom.

LOVE HIM OR LOATHE HIM, HE'S NOW ONE OF AEW'S TOP STARS. *PW!* SPOKE TO THE MAN NICKNAMED "FRESHLY SQUEEZED"—AND HIS TWO "BEST FRIENDS"—TO FIGURE OUT EXACTLY WHAT MAKES HIM TICK.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW



# To Care *or* Not to Care

IS **ORANGE CASSIDY** THE HERO  
WRESTLING NEEDS ...  
OR HIS OWN WORST ENEMY?

TEXT BY BRADY HICKS

**L**IKE AN EXPERT poker player, Orange Cassidy's face reveals so little about the real emotions that lie just beneath his too-cool, Fonzie-like demeanor. But other wrestlers underestimate him at their own peril, as a growing list of defeated, inevitably embarrassed opponents will attest.

Over the summer, Cassidy bet on himself in a big way by engaging legend Chris Jericho in a series of memorable matches that many regard as some of AEW's finest—propelling himself to the main event in the process. While many other competitors would collapse under that kind of pressure, Cassidy takes it all in stride.

"I wouldn't be here if I wasn't different," he said, when asked to justify his recent success.

A fitting response for the man announced from "Wherever" at a weight of "Whatever."

To Trent, O.C.'s AEW colleague and one of his closest allies, these moments of quiet composure and dignity speak greatly to the man he believes is going to change wrestling as we know it . . . even through outright nonchalance and complacency.

"I think he's a huge star," Trent told *PWI*. "He's just a cool cowboy. Wasn't Clint Eastwood almost always laid back in all of his movies? That's what Orange is."

Both in and out of the ring, Cassidy seems almost completely unflappable—steady and sure-handed even when



Orange Cassidy left Chris Jericho all wet (literally) in their Mimosa Mayhem Match at All Out. Though silly on the surface, it was the culmination of a feud that left Cassidy a bona fide star.



PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/AEW





The Best Friends, Chuck Taylor and Trent, remain Cassidy's biggest cheerleaders. But, if you're still not a fan, they're done trying to explain his shtick to you..

having to face the most unsettling of odds. "Then you'll see him get fired up," Trent said. "And it's something really special."

To many, Cassidy's win over Jericho at All Out—where he dunked "Le Champion" into a bath of fizzy mimosa—was a perfect example of "The King Of Sloth Style" realizing this potential.

Before a massive, international pay-per-view audience, Cassidy showed a passion and a fire he so rarely displays. And he never once seemed unnerved in doing so. Though famous for his slacker demeanor, casual look, and intermittent flurries of offense, he gave AEW faithful a first real glimpse into what he could—and probably should—be doing on a nightly basis.

Which begs the question: If Orange Cassidy were to try a little harder, might even more singles success (and even championship gold) follow? Wouldn't this make fans care about him even more? Chuck Taylor—who is Cassidy's other closest confidante—certainly doesn't think so.

"Getting people to care about you is a lost cause," Taylor said. "This whole thing of having to constantly sell Orange Cassidy to people who obviously don't get it and probably never will is worthless. I

don't feel the need to try to get them to care."

One man who certainly did not seem to care—or, indeed, to 'get' "Freshly Squeezed"—is the former AEW champ, Chris Jericho. The veteran tried his best this summer to downplay Cassidy's string of successful matches against him, even going so far as to spin it that it was his rub—just purely getting in the ring with Jericho—that made his rival a star in the eyes of the fans.

When asked for his comment, Cassidy was indifferent as ever. "Uhh, you know . . . yeah, sure," he said. "He made me a star."

What the 30-year veteran failed to realize, ironically, is how prepared Orange Cassidy would be for their fights.

Through years on the independents, O.C. cultivated a unique in-ring style inspired in part by the high-flying *oeuvre* of Jericho himself. Then, whether masterfully or inadvertently, he hid this planning behind the facade of a denim-clad, sunglasses-wearing man who just never seemed to care.

In their encounters, it was all too clear that Jericho had misread Cassidy's potential and failed to see him

Fans saw a more tenacious side of Orange Cassidy in his recent rivalry with Chris Jericho. Here, "Freshly Squeezed" applies an ankle lock on the former world champ.





as a threat. Never getting past this too-cool presentation is exactly what caused the Inner Circle leader to lose to him on more than one occasion. The question is, did Jericho overlook Orange Cassidy, or did Cassidy outsmart him?

Either way, what the memorable series showed many observers is that Orange Cassidy has the talent to be a top player in AEW when he is actually fully invested in his craft.

If nothing else, Chuck Taylor believes that his friend's laid-back demeanor is his biggest asset—a tongue-in-cheek, entertaining persona that endears him to more casual fans.

"I listen to comedy podcasts and horror movie podcasts, and all sorts of stuff like that," Taylor said. "And they're talking about Orange Cassidy. He's doing this crazy thing that they've never seen before. He took off running and jumped onto a pile of guys with his hands in his pockets. That is what's going to get him to the next level over any of the rest of us who are just out there in tights and doing dropkicks."

To be sure, much of Cassidy's recent success can be attributed to his luring unsuspecting victims into a false sense of security. Too often, in-ring competitors

form preconceived ideas of what a successful wrestler needs to be. Cassidy, meanwhile, is earning his reputation slowly as a man who proves one's perception of what is normal is not necessarily always accurate.

In other words, what he has done in AEW so far has worked because he is different, he carries himself differently, and he tricks opponents into buying into his disinterested facade before showing them what he can actually accomplish.

Or maybe Orange Cassidy has entirely bought into the idea himself. Regardless of what he actually feels—

we will probably never know—his real and biggest test is moving forward after laying out all of his cards in the ring against Jericho. Without the element of surprise, could the adage that "hard work pays off" be more important to his future success than ever before?

After all, why should fans invest in or care about Cassidy when he does not even appear to care about anything himself? And, regardless of who he beats, why would matchmakers keep him in the main event picture, where he might just decide to put his hands in his pockets and coolly walk away?

"I care when I have to," Cassidy said. "Sometimes I have to care. Sometimes I don't."

Call it arrogance, or call it brilliance. The fact remains that Orange Cassidy has already reached heights far beyond what many observers had predicted. And, if we had to guess, we'd wager he has a few more tricks tucked away in those denim pockets. □



PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

Thanks to his humorous antics—like his signature hands-in-pockets dive—Cassidy has become a favorite of casual fans and die-hards alike.

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW



Legit toughs such as PAC have underestimated Cassidy, who psyches out foes with gentle kicks and other "lazy" offense before entering a higher gear. As Cassidy himself says, he cares when he has to.



# DOING IT *for the* CULTURE

**PWI'S TOP-RANKED INDIE WRESTLER WANTS TO  
EMPOWER HIMSELF ... AND HIS PEERS**

**TEXT BY RIGHTEOUS REG**

**O**CTOBER 29th, 2019 will go down as an important day in Black wrestling history. The day began with then-NXT superstar ACH taking to Twitter to express concerns with upper management in WWE surrounding a controversial t-shirt design. (He and the company would soon part ways.) In the middle of the chaos, independent wrestler AJ Gray announced that, during WrestleMania weekend the following April, he (in tandem with Game Changer Wrestling) would present his own show that would put the focus on Black wrestlers in the industry, called "For The Culture." Sadly, the planned festivities around WrestleMania weekend would all be called off due to COVID-19, and the historic show would have to wait. But its spokesman wouldn't be deterred.

This year, AJ Gray made his debut appearance on the *PWI* "500" at #63—the highest position of any independent wrestler. Even before the list dropped, Gray had been making the claim on Twitter for months that he's the best independent wrestler in the world. "That was me being bored online and having fun with it," he admitted. "Then I kind of realized, *Wait, some people really think this, too? Some of my peers in wrestling agree with me?*

Then, I started looking back, and, really, I've been on a hot streak since the beginning of 2019. Like, I've been wrestling all across the country. With each show, more and more people knew who I was before pulling up."

Gray has blazed a trail across major American indies like Black Label Pro, Glory Pro, Atlanta Wrestling Entertainment, Paradigm Pro, and Game Changer Wrestling. He's won the heavyweight title in several of

Last December, AJ Gray beat Nick Gage for the GCW belt in his home state of Tennessee. It was one of several prominent title wins that helped land him the highest position of any indie wrestler in this year's *PWI* "500."



PHOTO BY ROBERT BELLAMY



**AJ GRAY HAS TURNED  
HEADS AND COLLECTED  
GOLD WHILE DOING  
THINGS HIS WAY. NOW,  
THE OUTSPOKEN  
FORMER GCW CHAMP  
WANTS TO GIVE A  
PLATFORM TO OTHERS.**







Gray is equally comfortable squaring off with brawlers, technical wrestlers, and high-flyers like Facade, whom he prepares to level with a clubbing blow.

the companies mentioned—including ending Nick Gage’s long run with the GCW title last December—building a resume of exciting, hard-hitting matches to support his claim to be the best indie wrestler around.

This Tennessee native has always worked incredibly hard. A college football player who was tired of the grid-iron grind but still wanted to use the things he learned to progress forward, Gray moved into powerlifting. But he quickly got bored of the monotony of being a lifter and looked to something that had been around his entire life: pro wrestling.

Gray wanted to find a way to make his mark on the wrestling world, and he developed his own unique style

by watching hours of classic matches. “I just get on YouTube and Instagram and watch Japanese wrestling,” he said. “The style and how much they seem to care for what they’re doing really gets me into it.”

When asked to describe his own in-ring style, Gray responded by calling it “*Def Jam Vendetta* mixed with *puroresu*”—referencing the cult classic video game, *Def Jam Vendetta*, which combined hip-hop with pro wrestling and street fighting. “It’s funny, when I started out, I tried to do everything good instead of trying to do one thing great,” he recalls. “Now, I’ve kind of found my niche and style as a wrestler, and things are flowing more smoothly.”

Gray is, at times, a polarizing figure. Making headlines on a monthly basis with his popular Twitter account, he is never one to hold his tongue. From crude jokes to outspoken opinions, he’s gotten himself in hot water on occasion.

During Twitter debates about representation and opportunities for Black wrestlers, Gray has openly called out a number of companies for a lack of diversity. Even his critics would have to admit he often has a point. For one thing, the reason why his “For The Culture” announcement generated so much buzz was because there hadn’t been any major shows like it.

Even while maintaining what some would say is a controversial social media presence, Gray does not want that to define who he is as a pro wrestler. If there’s one thing he hates, it’s being pigeonholed—as evidenced by his surprising foray into deathmatches over the summer.

“Man, I don’t want anyone ever saying I can’t do something,” Gray said. “I took my shot to do one last December. This July, I jumped in full force against one of the most elite deathmatch workers, Alex Colon, and I did exactly what I planned on doing, proving that no matter what it is in wrestling, I can do it and I can do it well.”

PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD



The influence of Japanese wrestling greats (like Yoshihiro Takayama, far right) is evident in AJ Gray’s ring work. He describes his own style as part *puroresu*, part *Def Jam Vendetta*.

PHOTO BY KOICHI YOSHIKAWA







PHOTO BY EARL GARDNER

With his upcoming “For The Culture” event, Gray is able to celebrate the work of fellow Black wrestlers including ACH, who, like Gray, has become a mainstay of GCW shows.

It’s been an interesting run for a sound technical wrestler like Gray, made even more interesting because there aren’t many Black deathmatch workers. Once again, Gray won’t be boxed in.

Nearly six months after the original date—and with multiple successful, socially distanced shows now in the rearview—GCW’s “For The Culture” is back on, taking place a few weeks after press time under the banner of The Collective in Indianapolis. The card is set to feature the likes of ACH, Suge D, Trish Adora, and Trey Miguel. And though there are several big shows running that same weekend, Gray’s goal for his event is clear.

“I want ‘For The Culture’ to represent Black empowerment,” he said. “We’ve been told we are not good enough throughout time, even though we’ve been better than the best. It’s time to kill that idea and realize the star power that we got being ourselves.”

“For The Culture” is a showcase for Black talent on the independent wrestling scene, and Gray is at the head of the ship. For longtime Black wrestling fans (like me), a show like this is amazing—a way to get eyes on many wrestlers who deserve it. As an upwardly mobile performer himself, Gray knows that representation matters, and he’s done something about it.

As for the future, Gray is leaving the door open. “I don’t want a contract just to have one,” he said. “I want to be signed to a place one day that is 100 percent behind me and the way I move.”

There are many companies where Gray would be a great addition to the roster. He’s skilled in multiple styles and would fit in well with most any wrestler in any situation. If his personality is shown on the big stage, there is no reason he couldn’t be a big name for a major wrestling company. And, if that never happens?

“In the same breath, I want to be the most known independent wrestler that ever lived,” Gray said. “If I can set up a future for my family on the indies, then I one-hundred percent ain’t against never signing.”

It’s a tough road ahead, to be sure. But his track record, *PWI* ranking, and buzz all indicate that Gray is well on his way ... one championship, big match, and deathmatch at a time.

At the core of it all, AJ Gray is really like a lot of people: He wants to be the best in his profession while at the same time providing for his family. “I wanna be known as the greatest father and husband,” he said. “Who did everything he possibly could with what he loved to give everyone he cared for a wonderful life through wrestling.”

For Gray, the future of the wrestling business is within his grasp. It’s just a matter of what he will do with it. □

Never one to rest on his laurels, Gray recently began competing in ultraviolent deathmatches against the likes of Alex Colon. The outspoken grappler wants to prove he can excel in any environment.



PHOTO BY EARL GARDNER



# 2020 ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

NOW IS AN exciting time to be a wrestling fan. Despite the cancelation of so many live events by the pandemic, there is still an abundance of pro wrestling to watch—and, thanks to streaming services and traditional TV, seeing it all is easier than ever before.

In short, there's still plenty to celebrate. And, with that in mind, it's time again for you to cast your ballots for the *PWI* Achievement Awards. 10 out of 11 categories should look familiar to longtime readers; however, one category has changed. Given how well women wrestlers have been faring in our awards in recent years, we decided the annual Woman of the Year category had become almost moot. It has been replaced with a new category: Indie Wrestler of the Year.

Please keep in mind that our list of nominees for the 2020 awards is created in early fall, so there may well be candidates (particularly for Match of the Year) that might not have been included among our lists of nominees. We encourage you to write in your choices if they are not on the ballot.

As always, we warn you against attempts to "stuff the ballot box." It's easy for us to recognize a campaign designed to get votes for an undeserving wrestler. Those ballots will be discarded in the name of maintaining the integrity of the selection process. Please make sure to select only one winner in each category (ties will be discounted). And, when voting for Match of the Year, specify the date of the particular match so as to avoid confusion with other matchups between the same participants.

Finally, please remember to share your Unofficial Official Awards. When making up your awards and lists, get creative! Think outside the box and be as clever or silly as you like. Keep it clean and have some fun!

Here are a few of the highlights from last year's Unofficial Official Awards: **Laziest Wrestler of the Year:** Orange Cassidy; **Dean Martin, "Ain't That a Kick in the Head" Award:** Renee Young; **So Scary He Doesn't Need a Last Name:** WALTER; **This is Why Pushing to the Moon Never Works Out:** Ronda Rousey leaves after just one loss; **The Oldest New Kid on the Block:** Chris Jericho; **Triple H and Katie Vick Had More Chemistry:** Lana & Bobby Lashley; **Now Can We Ratify the Equal Rights Amendment?:** Natalya and Lacey Evans, dressed as winter blankets, liberate the women of Saudi Arabia; **The Blue Meanie:** Sasha Banks; **You Asked for It, You Got It:** CM Punk.

## ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

The wrestler you select as Rookie of the Year must fulfill two qualifications: 1.) They must have competed in their first professional match no earlier than January 1, 2019. 2.) Runners-up from last year's awards are ineligible.

**Top candidates for 2020:** Dominik Mysterio, Anna Jay, Aleah James, Matt Makowski, Saya Kamitani, Joshua Wavra, Xavier Faraday, Devantes, Abadon, Molly McCoy, Jody The Wrestler, Oswald Project

## MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

For Most Improved Wrestler of the Year, pick someone who, throughout 2020, did the most to improve their craft as a wrestler ... the competitor who has stepped it up in the ring or captured a major title for the first time. This wrestler can be a heel or a fan favorite, but the improvement should have been considerable and notable.

**Top candidates for 2020:** Otis, Drew McIntyre, Jey Uso, Jacob Fatu, Willie Mack, Kylie Rae, Apollo Crews, Ace Austin, Cara Noir, Ricky Starks, Richard Holliday, Sonya Deville

## COMEBACK WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

Here's an opportunity to honor a competitor who had a big year after suffering through a long period of stagnation or being out of the sport entirely.

**Top candidates for 2020:** Randy Orton, Chris Sabin, Ken Shamrock, Asuka, Eric Young, Mickie James, Masato Tanaka, Rob Van Dam, MVP

## INSPIRATIONAL WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

As the darker sides of athletes' personal lives are brought to light, it has become increasingly difficult to look to them as role models. But while the negative is often spotlighted, there also those who have quietly shown themselves to be human beings with the capacity to inspire with their actions. This category is not only open to active wrestlers, but anyone associated with the business.

**Top candidates for 2020:** Shad Gaspard, Jey Uso, Mustafa Ali, The #SpeakingOut Movement, Nyla Rose, Thunder Rosa, Willie Mack, WARHORSE, Tessa Blanchard, Drake Maverick

## MOST POPULAR WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

Popularity used to be self-explanatory: cheers, adoration, and the love of the fans. But in recent years,



some of the biggest heels have been among the sport's most popular stars, so wrestlers are eligible in this category as well as Most Hated.

**Top candidates for 2020:** Adam Cole, Keith Lee, Drew McIntyre, Asuka, Jon Moxley, Orange Cassidy, Kevin Owens, Big E, Hikaru Shida, Adam Page, Big Swole, Hiromu Takahashi, Nick Gage

## MOST HATED WRESTLER

The flip side of popularity: jeers and utter contempt from the public. Some wrestlers openly court the fans' hatred; others just don't care what they think. Who hears the loudest boos? That really is the only consideration in choosing your Most Hated Wrestler of the Year. This category is open to anyone connected with the business.

**Top candidates for 2020:** Seth Rollins, Bayley, Randy Orton, Roman Reigns, MJF, Baron Corbin, EVIL, Sami Callihan, Sasha Banks, Rickey Shane Page, Brodie Lee, Eric Young, Britt Baker, Karrion Kross

## FEUD OF THE YEAR

Every year, there are wars that capture the imagination of fans for months on end. The criterion is simple: Your choice for Feud of the Year should be that one continuing series of battles (verbal and/or physical)—lasting at least two months—that you feel has dominated the careers of the participants to the exclusion of all other activities. Special note: The wrestlers you select for Feud of the Year need not have wrestled each other numerous times.

**Top candidates for 2020:**

Bayley vs. Sasha Banks, Edge vs. Randy Orton, Chris Jericho vs. Orange Cassidy, Sami Callihan vs. Tessa Blanchard, Rush vs. PCO, MJF vs. Cody Rhodes, Sonya



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

Deville vs. Mandy Rose, Dakota Kai vs. Tegan Nox, Britt Baker vs. Big Swole, MJF vs. Mance Warner, Bullet Club vs. Los Ingobernables de Japon, Lady Maravilla vs. Big Mami

## INDIE WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

The independent scene hasn't been such an important part of the wrestling landscape in years. In recognition, this new category seeks to honor the top wrestler who, as of press time, remained "independent" (unattached to any major promotion) all year long. The Indie Wrestler of the Year should be graded on influence, notoriety, technical skill, and overall excellence.

**Top candidates for 2020:** WARHORSE, AJ Gray, Nick Gage, Effy, Allie Kat, Chris Dickinson, Faye Jackson, Trish Adora, Danhausen, Alex Zayne, Lee Moriarty, Ruby Raze, Heather Monroe, Tony Deppen

## MATCH OF THE YEAR

Every wrestling fan, at one time or another, thinks, *That was one of the greatest matches I've ever seen.* If that happened to you this year, you know what this category is all about. The bout chosen as Match of the Year might well have historical significance (such as a major title change), though that is not a specific requirement. **(Editor's note: Please remember to give fair consideration to matches that occur after the press date of this issue.)**

**Top candidates for 2020:** Takahashi-Ospreay (1/4), Okada-Ibushi (1/4), Naito-Okada (1/5), Blanchard-Callihan (1/12), Cole-Gargano (2/14), Ospreay-Sabre Jr. (2/14), Omega-PAC (2/26), Omega & Page-Young Bucks (2/29), Miyahara-Suwama (3/23), Flair-Ripley (4/5), McIntyre-Rollins (5/10), Edge-Orton (6/14), Shirai-Banks (7/1), Omega & Page-Private Party (7/1), Moriarty-Deppen (7/26), Best Friends-Santana & Ortiz (9/16), Rosa-Kelly (9/22), Reigns-Uso (9/27), Takagi-Ospreay (9/27)

## TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

Experience, skill, and success all count in this category, though whether a team is scientific or rulebreaking should make no difference. The Tag Team of the Year should be more than a great pairing; it should dominate the promotion in which it competes and elevate the form of tag wrestling.

**Top candidates for 2020:** Bayley & Sasha Banks, Kenny Omega & Adam Page, New Day, Street Profits, FTR, The North, Jay Lethal & Jonathan Gresham, Motor City Machine Guns, Kabuki Warriors, Team Sea Stars

## WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This is the top honor: The winner of this award should be the one person who has personified the essence of professional wrestling throughout 2020. Talent, skill, and achievement are the three prerequisites for this category. The competitor chosen as Wrestler of the Year should be the one wrestler whose accomplishments for the year stood out above all others.

**Top candidates for 2020:** Jon Moxley, Bayley, Adam Cole, Chris Jericho, Asuka, AJ Styles, Io Shirai, Sasha Banks, Keith Lee, Tetsuya Naito, Cody Rhodes, Rush



# OFFICIAL FAN BALLOT

Send ballot to: Achievement 2020 Awards, PWI, 6198 Butler Pike Ste 200, Blue Bell, PA 19422  
or e-mail to [prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com](mailto:prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com).

ROOKIE:

MOST POPULAR:

MOST IMPROVED:

MOST HATED:

INDIE:

COMEBACK:

INSPIRATIONAL:

FEUD:

MATCH:

TAG TEAM:

WRESTLER:

**BALLOTS DUE BY DEC. 8, 2020**

MY "UNOFFICIAL OFFICIAL AWARDS" FOR 2020:

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(Add more on separate sheet of paper if you like)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ AGE \_\_\_\_\_

STREET \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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with a subscription. We thought so.



# INTERNATIONAL REPORT

BY WALTER YEATES

**T**HE WRESTLING WORLD continues to mourn the loss of World Wonder Ring Stardom wrestler **Hana Kimura**, who tragically took her life after undergoing a severe amount of bullying over social media from fans of the Japanese reality television show *Terrace House*.

Hana's legacy will live on through her mother **Kyoko Kimura**, and her friends in the wrestling industry who continue to share stories about her. While only being 22 years old at the time of her death, Kimura touched the lives of fans who lived vicariously through the Tokyo Cyber Squad leader—who was known for her lavish ring attire, along with her charisma and potential for mainstream superstardom. At this time of loss, we must remember to always offer kindness, as we are unaware of what another is going through.

Inside the ring, Stardom returned from a lengthy COVID-19 absence to see Donna del Mondo member **Giulia** capture the Wonder of Stardom championship in a tournament after titleholder **Arisa Hoshiki** retired due to continuous neck injuries.

Queen's Quest members **Saya Kamitani** and **Utami Hayashishita** defeated Tokyo Cyber Squad members **Jungle Kyona** and **Konami** in a decision match for the Goddesses of Stardom title after Oedo Tai members **Bea Priestley** and **Jamie Hayter** vacated the championship due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

The wrestling scene in Mexico remained at a practical standstill due to the global pandemic. At the time of this writing, Lucha Libre AAA (AAA) and Consejo Mundial de la Lucha Libre (CMLL) had yet to return to operations. However, recent news suggests the pandemic is lessening in Mexico, meaning wrestling could fully return to the country before the end of the year.

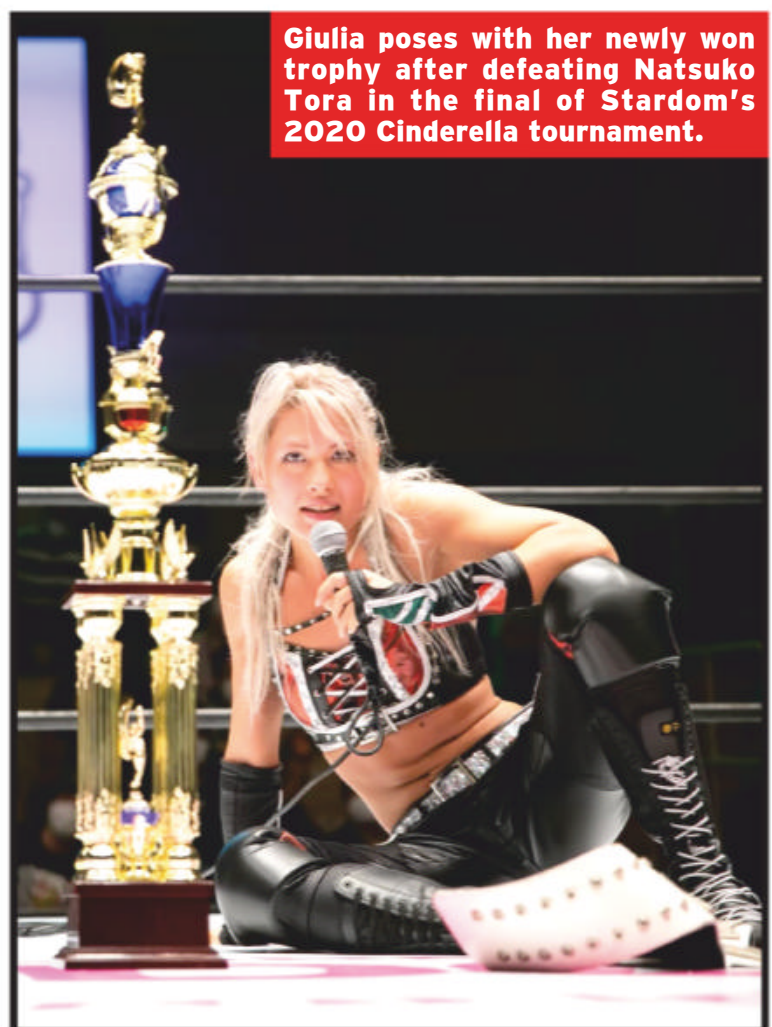
In the emerging wrestling territory of China, Middle Kingdom Wrestling (MKW) launched its weekly episodic wrestling show—entitled *Blast Off*—on August 28. The promotion began operating in 2015 and looks to expand its fanbase by providing content on YouTube. The sports entertainment-based product will be familiar to some fans, while others might need some time to adjust to the style.

In the United Kingdom, Revolution Pro Wrestling (RevPro) returned to action on August 23 and September 13 with Epic Encounters 1 & 2.

Epic Encounters 1 featured a full card that didn't disappoint. In what

many would deem an upset, **Aleah James** defeated Tokyo Cyber Squad member **Bobbi Tyler**. Despite not being able to wrestle during the COVID-19 break, Tyler looked crisp and sharp in the ring. The young James continues to improve, and her rivalry with Tyler's tag team partner **Zoe Lucas** looks to continue. After the match, Lucas chased James to the back.

In a headlining bout, **Kyle Fletcher** and **Ricky Knight Jr.** defeated RevPro Undisputed British cruiserweight champion **Michael Oku** and RevPro Undisputed British heavyweight champion **Will Ospreay**. In



Giulia poses with her newly won trophy after defeating Natsuko Tora in the final of Stardom's 2020 Cinderella tournament.

©STARDOM



another upset, Knight was able to get the fall on Ospreay.

The marquee main event saw **Gisele Shaw** retain the RevPro Undisputed British Women's championship against Jamie Hayter in what was an impressive performance by both women.

Epic Encounters 2 saw Ospreay defeat his understudy, the teen-aged **Callum Newman**, in what would be Ospreay's last match before returning to New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW) for this year's G1 Climax tournament.

Bea Priestley and Jamie Hayter defeated Aleah James and Gisele Shaw, in a match that came about after Priestley challenged Shaw and James to a tag match during Epic Encounters 1.

The marquee match saw Michael Oku defeat Ricky Knight Jr. to unify the RevPro Undisputed British cruiserweight title and the SWE Speed King championship held by Knight.

NJPW returned to action in June, and has produced a number of headlines since. **EVIL** won the prestigious New Japan Cup 2020 on July 11, the same night he turned on **Tetsuya Naito** and Los Ingobernables de Japon (LIJ) to join Bullet Club.

The next night at Dominion, EVIL would defeat Naito for the IWGP heavyweight and IWGP Intercontinental "Double Championship," leading to the presumed new leader of Bullet Club becoming a global trend on Twitter. That night, **Dick Togo** made his first appearance with NJPW since a one-off appearance in July 2017. Before 2017, Togo had not appeared in NJPW since June 2011.

At July 25's Sengoku Lord event, EVIL successfully defended the "Double Championship" against IWGP Junior heavyweight champion and LIJ member **Hiromu Takahashi**. Takahashi's IWGP



**At Dominion, Dick Togo made his first NJPW appearance in several years as he helped EVIL win the coveted IWGP "Double Championship" from Tetsuya Naito.**

heavyweight title attempt was only the second time a reigning IWGP Junior heavyweight champ challenged for New Japan's top prize. The first such match occurred on July 20, 2013, when **Prince Devitt (Finn Balor)** challenged **Kazuchika Okada**. It was also the first time a reigning IWGP Junior heavyweight champion challenged for the IWGP Intercontinental belt.

The path was set for Summer Struggle in Jingu, an outdoor event at Jingu Stadium—a show that would be headlined by a hotly anticipated EVIL-Naito rematch.

Summer Struggle in Jingu saw Takahashi unable to retain the IWGP Junior heavyweight championship. Bullet Club member **Taiji Ishimori** defeated him to begin his second reign with the prestigious title.

The **Dangerous Tekkers (Zack Sabre Jr. and Taichi)** mounted a successful first defense of the IWGP tag team title against the **Golden Aces (Kota Ibushi and Hiroshi Tanahashi)**.

In the main event, Tetsuya Naito defeated EVIL for the IWGP heavyweight and IWGP Intercontinental championships. The win marked Naito's third reign with the former title and his sixth with the latter.

NJPW also announced G1 Climax 30. Highlights will include the return to Japan of "**Switchblade**" **Jay White**, Will Ospreay, **Jeff Cobb**, and **KENTA**. **Minoru Suzuki** also returns to the G1 after not being involved last year.

In news that has gone somewhat under the radar, as NJPW looks to attract a high-dollar TV deal within the United States, the launching of the *New Japan Strong* program has laid the foundation for an American arm of the brand. **Fred Rosser**, who was known as **Darren Young** in WWE, recently made his debut on the show.

**ACH**, **Blake Christian**, **Danny Limelight**, **Adrian Quest**, and **The DKC** are notable names who have made their debut or return to NJPW via *New Japan Strong* in recent weeks. □



# INDEPENDENT ROUNDUP

BY MIKE BESSLER

**H**OPE AND UNITY were the prevailing themes of the first ever Black Wrestlers Matter show, held at the Franklin Jr. High Auditorium in Des Moines, Iowa, on August 22. The event, organized by wrestler and promoter **Jon West**, presented a *tour de force* of African-American talent from far and wide before an enthusiastic audience of live attendees and online viewers.

When West first announced the event back in June, he was quickly inundated with excited wrestlers clamoring for a spot on the card. He ultimately assembled a roster of over 40 wrestlers for the show, along with additional in-ring and event staff.

"I started the BWM movement in 2015. I felt like Black wrestlers didn't get showcased the way we should. At every show I worked, I was the only Black personality," West recalled. "I wanted to have an event where I could show, 'We're a part of this business too, look at what we can do,' from wrestlers to ring announcers and referees."

The night's pre-show kicked off with a singles bout in which **S.K. Bishop** defeated **Ty Ray**, followed by a 17-person "For the Culture" rumble contest. **Kendra Hall**, co-owner of True Privilege Wrestling, received one of the most enthusiastic reactions from the crowd as she entered the ring to square off against a slew of male competitors. The final battle came down to a clash between **Con Artiest**

and **De'Lorian Diggs**, with Diggs eliminating Artiest with a clothesline over the top rope.

Monster grappler **Mojo McQueen** and AEW star **Sonny Kiss** were among the talent-rich roster of the night's undercard, all of whom set the stage for the evening's main event between **Justin D. Xavier (JDX)** and **ACH**. Before locking up, JDX performed his pre-match ritual, throwing a plume of powder into the air.

"Typically, whenever I do 'the toss,' I take a moment to thank God for allowing me to do what I love in life, and I also think about my ancestors and pay homage to the McCoys—specifically, my grandmother, granddad, and my father who have all passed away," JDX explained. "But, on that night in particular, I was also paying homage to the likes of **Breonna Taylor**, **George Floyd**, **Ahmaud Arbery**, and **Trayvon Martin**."

The contest between ACH and JDX spanned nearly 30 minutes, including action in the ring and into the audience. Sensing the importance of the event, referee **Adam**

**Kennedy** exercised leniency by not ending the match with a count-out. Once back in the ring, it was JDX who scored the final victory, hitting his opponent with his signature reverse powerbomb finisher and earning the win via pinfall.

After receiving tremendous fan response and critical accolades following the show, Jon West is already planning the next Black Wrestlers Matter show, which is slated for Juneteenth (June 19) 2021.



PHOTO BY CHRIS MANNING

Tossing powder into the air, JDX pays his respects to Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and other Black Americans whose tragic deaths were on the minds of performers, organizers, and fans at the inaugural Black Wrestlers Matter event.



AEW standout and new Cluck-U Chicken spokesperson **Joey Janela** returned to his old stomping grounds of Game Changer Wrestling on August 23, topping the card at the promotion's Jersey Shore show. Janela squared off against viral sensation **Alex Zayne**, earning the win via three-count after landing a devastating backflip double-stomp as his Taco Bell-loving opponent lay pinned beneath half of a broken door. "I had the win in my sights when my dive through the ladder to the outside didn't go quite as planned," Zayne said. "Laying there on the boardwalk, I remembered I hadn't had my pre-match Baja Blast. That would have changed everything. I'd love another shot at the 'Bad Boy' when I'm properly fueled." ... No stranger to intergender contests, "**Dirty Daddy**" **Chris Dickinson** collided with former SHINE champion **Priscilla Kelly** in the main event of Beyond Wrestling's August 23 show in Atlantic City. Dickinson came out on top after consistently working Kelly's leg for the duration of the match and ultimately putting her out of commission with an unforgiving STF. Although relentless in the ring, Dickinson shared words of praise for his opponent. "Priscilla is all about testing herself," he said. "She has a strong will to prove her skills are more than adequate, as well as the physical toughness necessary to compete against larger opponents. Her striking and submission abilities caught me by surprise." ... **Calvin Tankman's** much-heralded debut for Black Label Pro went down in the books as something of a mixed bag when the recent MLW signee wrestled back-to-back bouts at BLP's August 22 show in Crown Point, Indiana. Initially granted a title shot by champ **Erick Stevens**, Tankman held his own against the incumbent champ, eventually



**Priscilla Kelly locks Chris Dickinson in a painful submission hold at Beyond Wrestling's August 23 event in Atlantic City. For more photos from this show, check our Arena Reports section.**

winning the strap by taking Stevens out with his signature G.F.D. finisher. Tankman had little time to celebrate with his newfound gold, as **Jake Something** cashed in his own title shot after the bell. Exhausted from his clash with Stevens, Tankman was picked apart by Something, dropping the strap to his impromptu opponent after a short match punctuated by a Black Hole Slam ... "**Mr. Everything**" **Victor Andrews** was an elbow drop away from defeating **Jason Kincaid** at the September 5 Ring Wars Carolina event in Lumberton, North Carolina, but victory slipped away due to a momentary distraction. As he was poised to take out Kincaid from the top rope, Andrews was rattled by the sudden and unexpected sound of rival **Caribbean Tiger's** theme music over the venue's PA system. The timely diversion gave "The Gift" an opportunity to launch a counter-attack on Andrews and dispatch him with a double-stomp before collecting the pinfall ... **Colin**

**Delaney** and **Cheech**, known collectively as **To Infinity and Beyond**, marked a historic win at Absolute Intense Wrestling's September 6 show in Indianapolis, Indiana. Defeating the **Philly and Marino Experience** (comprised of **Marino Tenaglia** and **Philly Collins**) via pinfall, Delaney and Cheech became five-time co-holders of the AIW tag straps ... ECW original **Super Crazy** added another accomplishment to an already storied career at the Coastal Championship Wrestling event in Nashville, Tennessee, on August 28, defeating indie vet **Pablo Marquez** to become the inaugural Allied Independent Wrestling Federation Latin American champion. The two competitors battled for almost half an hour, with Crazy coming out on top after landing his hallmark moonsault on Pablo to secure victory. Although it was rolled out in the U.S., the new AIWF strap will eventually be defended in Latin American countries throughout North and South America. □

PHOTO BY ROBERT BELLAMY



# ARENA REPORTS

We encourage promoters and readers to e-mail results to:

**PWIResults@yahoo.com**

Please try to utilize the exact format you see in the "Arena Reports." Also, please distinguish between handicap matches and three- or four-way matches. And, when reporting the result of a handicap match, indicate the number of competitors and who was the last man eliminated. Finally, please note pinfall finishes. Following these guidelines will help us greatly and make it more likely that your report will be used.

## SPOTLIGHT CARD OF THE MONTH

### NEW JERSEY

**ATLANTIC CITY**—Beyond Wrestling at Garden Pier: **KTB** defeated **Crash Jaxon** ... **Willow Nightingale** pinned **Max Caster** ... **Pinkie Sanchez** pinned **Solo Darling** ... **Lady Frost & Victor Benjamin** beat **Bear Bronson & Bear Boulder** ... **Allie Kat** pinned **Slade** ... **Jordan Oliver & Myron Reed** defeated **Christian Casanova & Tasha Steelz** ... **Joey Janela** pinned **Kimber Lee** ... **Chris Dickinson** defeated **Priscilla Kelly** by submission. (08-23-20)

—Spotlight photos by Robert Bellamy

### FLORIDA

**MINNEOLA**—World Xtreme Wrestling at the Minneola City Hall: **TKO** defeated **MM** ... **GQ Ice** beat **The Diamond Kid** and **Sean Scott** in a triple-threat ... **D3** defeated **Lee Aguirre** ... Women's champion **Marina Tucker** defeated **Raeven**, **Dynamite Didi**, and **Rocky Radley** in a four-way ... Women's tag team champions **Linda & Laur** beat **Roxy Rouge & Lexii Gomez** ... **Gangrel & Anna Diaz** defeated **Frankie Burbank** and **Sofia Castillo** ... **Vertigo Rivera** defeated **Romeo Quevedo** in a no-DQ match ... **Mr. C & Salazar** beat **David King & Sage Scott**, **JD & Jeremiah**, and **WXW** tag team champions **Jay Sky & Richard King** to win the title ... **WXW** champion **Chico Adams** defeated **Vinny Mac**, **Sean Maluta**, and **WXW TV** champion **D Ramos** to win the title. (09-12-20)

—Daniel Max Shaw

**JACKSONVILLE**—AEW All Out at Daily's Place: **Joey Janela** beat **Serpentico** ... **Isiah Kassidy & Marq Quen** defeated **Alex Reynolds & John Silver** ... **Big Swole** defeated **Britt Baker** by referee's decision in a Tooth and Nail Match ... **Matt Hardy** beat **Sammy Guevara** in a Broken Rules Match ... Women's champion **Hikaru Shida** pinned **Thunder Rosa** ... **Dustin**

**Rhodes**, **QT Marshall**, **Matt Cardona**, & **Scorpio Sky** beat **Brodie Lee**, **Colt Cabana**, **Evil Uno**, & **Stu Grayson** ... **Dax Harwood & Cash Wheeler** defeated **AEW** World tag team champions **Kenny Omega & Adam Page** to win the title ... **Orange Cassidy** beat **Chris Jericho** in a Mimosa Mayhem Match ... World champion **Jon Moxley** pinned **Maxwell Jacob Friedman**. (09-05-20)

—Kevin McElvaney

**ORLANDO**—WWE Payback at the Amway Center: **Ruby Riott & Liv Morgan** beat **Peyton Royce & Billie Kay** ... **Bobby Lashley** defeated **U.S. champion Apollo Crews** by submission to win the title ... **Big E** pinned **Sheamus** ... **Matt Riddle** defeated **King Corbin** ... **Nia Jax & Shayna Baszler** beat Women's tag team champions **Bayley & Sasha Banks** to win the title ... **Keith Lee** beat **Randy Orton** ... **Dominik & Rey Mysterio** beat **Seth Rollins & Murphy** ... **Roman Reigns** defeated **Braun Strowman** and **Universal champion Bray Wyatt** in a triple-threat to win the title. (08-30-20)

—Jason McVeigh

**ORLANDO**—WWE SummerSlam at the Amway Center: **U.S. champion Apollo Crews** defeated **MVP** ... **Smackdown Women's champion Bayley** defeated **Asuka** ... **Raw tag team champions Angelo Dawkins & Montez Ford** defeated **Andrade & Angel Garza** ... **Mandy Rose** beat **Sonya Deville** in a no-DQ, Loser Leaves WWE match ... **Seth Rollins** beat **Dominik Mysterio** in a streetfight ... **WWE champion Drew McIntyre** defeated **Randy Orton** ... **Bray Wyatt** beat **Universal champion Braun Strowman** in a falls-count-anywhere match to win the title. (08-23-20)

—Kevin McElvaney

**WINTER PARK**—NXT TakeOver XXX at Full Sail University: **Tyler Breeze & Fandango** defeated **Joaquin Wilde & Raul Mendoza** and **Oney Lorcan & Danny Burch** in a triple-threat ... **Finn Balor** beat **Timothy Thatcher** ... **Damian Priest** defeated **Johnny Gargano**, **Velveteen Dream**, **Cameron Grimes**, and **Bronson Reed** in a five-way ladder match to win the vacant North American championship ... **Adam Cole** defeated **Pat McAfee** ... Women's champion **Io Shirai** beat **Dakota Kai** ... **Karrion Kross**



**Kimber Lee clips Joey Janela with an impressive enziguri. Unfortunately for the SHIMMER champ, Janela's top-rope double-stomp would ultimately prove too much for her.**



defeated NXT champion **Keith Lee** to win the title.  
(08-22-20)

—*Jason McVeigh*

## GEORGIA

**TYRONE**— Action Wrestling at Roger Spencer Community Center: **Nolan Edward** pinned **Kevin Ryan** ... **Bobby Flaco** defeated **BK Westbrook** ... **Jaden Newman** pinned **Donnie Janela** ... **1 Called Manders** defeated **Graham Bell** ... **Arik Royal** pinned **Pineapple Pete** ... **ACTION** and **SUP Bonestorm** champion **AC Mack** beat **Brett Ison**.  
(09-04-20)

—*Philip Stamper*

**TYRONE**— Action Wrestling at Roger Spencer Community Center: **Graham Bell** pinned **Fearless Musa** ... **Adam Priest** defeated **Patrick Heeter** by submission ... **Arik Royal** pinned **1 Called Manders** ... **Nolan Edward** defeated **Angelus Layne** ... **Effy** pinned **Matt Sells**.  
(09-04-20)

—*Philip Stamper*

## ILLINOIS

**CHICAGO**—Zelo Pro at Joe's on Weed St.: **Kylie Rae** beat **Jay Raves** ... **Jason Hades** & **Storm Grayson** beat **Davey Bang** & **August Matthews** ... **Isaias Velazquez** defeated **Trevor Outlaw** ... **WARHORSE** beat **Bryce Benjamin** ... **CJ Esparza** defeated **Joey Marx** and **Jacob Dean** in a triple-threat ... **Mason Conrad** beat **Gary Jay** ... **Elayna Black** & **Blair Onyx** defeated **Laynie Luck** & **Miss Kate** ... **Matt Rehwoldt** beat **Brubaker** by DQ.  
(09-17-20)

—*Zelo Pro*

**OREGON**—ZOWA Live at Northside BarbaQ: **Christian Rose** & **Herrick** beat **Hartenbower** & **Judd The Janitor** ... **Lt. Dan** defeats **Dakota** ... **Heather Reckless** defeated **Valentina Loca** ... *Fireweight Title Tournament, Semi-Finals:* **Doc Simmons** defeated **Gunner Brave** ... **12 Gaike** beat **Damien Deschain** ... *Final:* **Doc Simmons** defeated **12 Gaike** to become the inaugural ZOWA Live Fireweight champion.  
(09-12-20)

—*GrappleTalk Podcast*

## INDIANA

**CROWN POINT**—Black Label Pro at RDS Gym: **Danhausen** & **WARHORSE** beat **Erick Stevens** & **Tom Lawlor** ... **Jack Griffin** defeated **Dan The Dad** ... **Dominic Garrini** & **Kevin Ku** defeated **Joshua Bishop** & **Wes Barkley** ... **Alex Zayne** beat **Lee Moriarty** ... Heavyweight champion **Jake Something** defeated **Billie Starkz** ... **Calvin Tankman** defeated **Aaron Williams** ... Tag team champions **Davey Vega** & **Mat Fitchett** beat **Kylie Rae** & **Isaias Velazquez**.  
(09-06-20)

—*Jake Joyce*



**Chris Dickinson lands a hard roundhouse kick on Priscilla Kelly in the latter's Beyond Wrestling debut. Dickinson would eventually earn the win by submission, but not without a tough fight from his tenacious opponent.**

**INDIANAPOLIS**—Game Changer Wrestling at Celebration Plaza Ampitheater: **Thunderkitty** defeated **Billie Starkz** ... **Jordan Oliver** beat **Benjamin Carter** ... **Chris Dickinson** beat **Alex Colon** ... **Tony Deppen** defeated **Calvin Tankman** ... **KTB** & **Shane Mercer** beat **Tre' Lamar** & **Lee Moriarty** ... **Allie Kat** defeated **Ethan Page** ... **AJ Gray** beat **Mance Warner** ... **Atticus Cogar** defeated **Ace Austin**, **Cole Radrick**, **DylN McKay**, **Nate Webb**, and **Jimmy Lloyd** in a six-way scramble ... **Joey Janela** defeated **Effy** ... **Rickey Shane Page** beat **Matthew Justice** ... **Blake Christian** defeated **ACH**.  
(09-06-20)

—*Mike Bessler*

**MADISON**—Supreme Wrestling at the Supreme Arena: **The Knights of the Squared Circle** defeated **Jesse Morris** & **Gaston LaRue** ... Light heavyweight champion **Billy Mattern** defeated **Dewey Wellington** and **Chet Rippley** in a triple-threat match ... Tag team champions **Eric Draven** & **Gaston LaRue** beat **The McRoberts** ... **Morgan Taylor** pinned **Van Martigan** ... **Josh Lewis** pinned **Brian Dewey** ... **Roger Malcolm** defeated **Gaston LaRue** ... **Kash Jackson** pinned **Eric Draven** ... **Angus Barnett** pinned Supreme heavyweight champion **Leon Elliot** to win the title.  
(9-05-20)

—*Jason Cohen*

**CROWN POINT**—Black Label Pro at RDS Gym: **Joshua Bishop** beat **Gary Jay** in a no-DQ match ... **Trey Miguel** defeated **Tre' Lamar** ... **Dan The Dad** defeated **Colin Delaney**, **Cabana Man Dan**, and **Jake Manning** in a four-way ... **Davey Vega** & **Mat Fitchett** defeated tag team champions **Danhausen** & **Ethan Page** to win the title ... **Effy** beat **Gangrel** ... Heavyweight champion **Jake Something** defeated **Chris Masters** ... **Billie Starkz**

defeated **Elayna Black** ... **Big Beef** beat **Levi Everett** ... Midwest champion **Kylie Rae** defeated **Blake Christian**.  
(08-22-20)

—*Jake Joyce*

**CROWN POINT**—Black Label Pro at RDS Gym: **Dominic Garrini** & **Kevin Ku** beat **Alex Zayne** & **Blake Christian** ... **AJ Gray** defeated **Arik Royal** ... IWTW champion **WARHORSE** beat **A Very Good Professional Wrestler** ... **Anthony Henry** beat **Benjamin Carter** ... **Isaias Velazquez** defeated **Alex Shelley** ... **Josh Alexander** defeated **Lee Moriarty** ... **Calvin Tankman** beat heavyweight champion **Erick Stevens** for the title ... **Jake Something** defeated heavyweight champion **Calvin Tankman** to win the title.  
(08-22-20)

—*Jake Joyce*

## MICHIGAN

**MELVINDALE**—Pro Wrestling All Stars at Play Atlantis: **LJ Lawrence** pinned **Geo Bronco** ... **Sean Lawhorn** defeated **Ric Caurdiea** by countout ... Junior champion **TJ Meyer** wrestled **Mitch Hewitt** to a draw ... **The Bitcoin Boys** defeated **Horror Slam** tag team champions **Arthur McArthur** & **Chuck Stone/Mikey Mana** to win the title ... **Chinstrap Jesus** pinned **Atlas Hytower** ... **Jheras** & **Jimi Grey** defeated **PWAS** tag team champions **Peter B. Beautiful** & **Percy Drews** to win the title ... **The Sultaker** defeated **Alex Van Zant** in a casket match ... Heavyweight champion **Dread King Logan** defeated **Zach Thomas** by DQ.  
(09-18-20)

—*Leonard Brand*

**BROWNSTOWN**—Horror Slam Wrestling at Drink's Saloon: **Rhino** pinned **Chinstrap Jesus** ... **Joseline Navarro** & **Alyx Gates** defeated **Jeremiah Goldmain** & **Dr. Daniel**





**With an assist from her tag partner Christian Casanova, Tasha Steelz hits a leg drop on Injustice member Myron Reed. Though Steelz and Casanova performed admirably, the experience and chemistry of Reed and Jordan Oliver won out in the end.**

**C. Rockingham ... Zach Thomas** defeated **Sam Beale** and **Damian Chambers** in a triple-threat ... **Jheras Grey** wrestled **Jimi Grey** to a no-contest ... Jheras & Jimi Grey defeated **Eric Taylor & Mikey Montgomery** ... Heavyweight champion **Breyer Wellington** pinned **Jeff King** ... **Ric Caurdiea** defeated **Brian Conville & Tyriq Kalam** in a handicap match ... Tag team champions **Arthur McArthur & Chuck Stone** defeated **Peter B. Beautiful & Percy Drews** ... **Malcolm Monroe III** pinned **Trey Miguel** ... Death Match champion **Aidan Blackhart** pinned **Eric Ryan**.  
(09-13-20)

—Leonard Brand

**KALKASKA**—Mr. Chainsaw Productions Wrestling at the Fairgrounds Civic Center: Heavyweight champion **Jumal Kyng** defeated **Christopher Saint** and **Dickie Watts** in a triple-threat ... **Max Morrison** pinned **Conrad Loucks** ... **Tommy Vendetta** pinned **Rhino** ... **Dre Jacobs & TJ Meyer** defeated **Jack Price & Isaiah Broner** ... **Effy** pinned **Nolan Edward** ... **Rohit Raju** defeated **Mitch Hewitt, Sean Tyler, Nate Bock, Blake 182, and Chase Burnett** in a six-way ... **Jack Verville** pinned **Neil Gerard** in a career-versus-career match.  
(09-12-20)

—Leonard Brand

**DETROIT**—Pro Wrestling All Stars at the Knights of Columbus Hall: **Ryan Freeman** pinned **Alex Van Zant** ... **Sean Lawhorn** pinned **Daniel Wolf** ... **Atlas Hytower** wrestled **Chinstrap Jesus** to a no-contest ... **Ric Caurdiea** pinned **Geo Bronco** ... **Jeffrey John** pinned **Darrell Jackson** ... **Matt Hagen** pinned **Great Akuma** ... **Mysterious Movado** pinned **Nick Maus** ... **LJ Lawrence** defeated **The Soultaker** by DQ ... **El Toro & Timo Cruz** defeated **Mikey Mana & Cluckey** ... Junior champion **TJ Meyer** pinned **Darrian Ultra** ... **Jheras & Jimi**

**Grey** defeated tag team champions **Peter B. Beautiful & Percy Drews** by DQ ... **Atlas Hytower & Tanner Nix** beat **Steven Rivera & Chinstrap Jesus**.  
(09-11-20)

—Leonard Brand

## NEW JERSEY

**WRIGHTSTOWN, NJ**—United Wrestling Coalition at Kelly's Bar: **Jay Curcio** pinned **Crisis Creed** ... **Adonis Valerio** pinned **Flash Carter** ... **Kurt Bale & The Hollywood Hooligan** defeated **Kama Kozzy & Ace Jones** ... **Iron Bull Argus** pinned **The Orphan** in a lumberjack match ... **Joey Angelo, Tony Chini, & Francesca** defeated **Eric Corvis, Mike Swanson, & Oliver Bailey** ... **Dom Truex** pinned **Crisis Creed** ... **Biggie Biggs** pinned heavyweight champion **Mr. Spectrum** to win the title.  
(9-19-20)

—Joseph Grana

**MORGANVILLE**—ECWA 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Super 8 Tournament at The Jersey Dugout: **Greg Spitz & Teddy Fine** defeated Unified tag team champions **Jay D. Luscious & Mr. Ooh-La-La** to win the title ... **Joey Ace** beat Unified heavyweight champion **Sam Shields** to win the title ... *Super 8 Tournament, Quarterfinals:* **Archadia** defeated **Vinny Pacifico** ... **Matt Tremont** defeated **Chris Rockwell** ... **KTB** beat **Devantes** ... **A Very Good Professional Wrestler** defeated **Eric Martin** ... *Semi-Finals:* **KTB** beat **Matt Tremont** ... **A Very Good Professional Wrestler** defeated **Archadia** ... *Final:* **A Very Good Professional Wrestler** defeated **KTB**.  
(09-19-20)

—Brady Hicks

**ATLANTIC CITY**—Game Changer Wrestling at Garden Pier: **Cole Radrick**

defeated **AR Fox** ... **Chris Dickinson** defeated **Lee Moriarty** ... **Blake Christian** beat **Andrew Everett** ... **AJ Gray** defeated **Lucky 13** ... **KTB & Shane Mercer** beat **Jordan Oliver & Myron Reed** ... **Jimmy Lloyd** defeated **Elayna Black** in a deathmatch ... **Joey Janela** beat **Alex Zayne**.  
(08-23-20)

—Andrew Coppola

**ATLANTIC CITY**—Game Changer Wrestling at Garden Pier: **AR Fox** defeated **Andrew Everett, Jordan Oliver, KTB, Myron Reed, and Lucky 13** in a six-way scramble ... **Chris Dickinson** beat **Eddy Only** ... *Tournament of Survival 5, Quarterfinals:* **Rickey Shane Page** defeated **Jimmy Lloyd** ... **Eric Ryan** beat **Shane Mercer** by referee's decision ... **Atticus Cogar** beat **Allie Kat** ... **Alex Colon** defeated **SHLAK** ... *Semi-finals:* **Rickey Shane Page** defeated **Eric Ryan** ... **Alex Colon** beat **Atticus Cogar** ... *Final:* **Alex Colon** defeated **Rickey Shane Page**.  
(08-23-20)

—Andrew Coppola

**WILLIAMSTOWN**—Intergender Bonanza 6 at H2O Wrestle Center: **Frankie Pickard** defeated **Davienne** ... **Calvin Couture & Tyler Klein** beat **Sean Henderson & Vanity** ... **Kristian Ross** defeated **Happy Hour** in an open challenge ... **Ava Everett** defeated **Mr. Ooh-La-La** ... **Adena Steele** beat **Marc Angel** ... Intergender Bonanza champion **Ray Lyn** defeated **Mike Law, Drew Blood, Xavier Cross, and Zoey Skye** in a five-way ... **Matt Tremont** wrestled **Stan Stylez** to a no-contest in a Fans Bring the Whipped Cream Match ... **Matt Tremont & Stan Stylez** defeated **Marc Angel and Jimmy Lyon**.  
(08-22-20)

—Stan Stylez

## PENNSYLVANIA

**WASHINGTON**—International Wrestling Cartel Super Indy 19 at Wild Things Park: Women's champion **Ray Lyn** defeated **Dani Mo** ... **Andrew Palace, Anthony Young, Bill Collier, & Spencer Slade** beat **Angelik, Don Murphy, Elijah Dean, & Mambo Italiano** ... **Jock Samson** beat **Jack Pollock** and heavyweight champion **Jimmy Vegas** in a triple-threat to win the title ... *Super Indy Tournament, Quarterfinals:* **Lee Moriarty** defeated **Zachary Wentz** ... **Josh Alexander** beat **Ace Austin** ... **Brian Pillman Jr.** defeated **Facade** ... **Sam Adonis** beat Super Indy champion **Johnny Patch** to win the title ... *Semi-Finals:* **Lee Moriarty** defeated **Josh Alexander** ... **Brian Pillman Jr.** beat Super Indy champion **Sam Adonis** to win the title ... *Final:* Super Indy champion **Brian Pillman Jr.** beat **Lee Moriarty** to win the tournament.  
(09-12-20)

—Mike Bessler



## TENNESSEE

**SEVIERVILLE**—KAPOW and Kross Fire Wrestling at River Plantation RV Resort: **Shean Christopher, Kevin Ryan, & Chris Chrunkk** defeated **Axton Ray, Hunter Drake, & Tyler Franks** ... **Joshua Cutshall** pinned **JD Drake** ... **Kerry Morton** pinned **George South** ... **Schaff** defeated **Mr. Grim, Gnarl's Garvin, and Calvin Tankman** in a four-way ... **Kenzie Paige & Dillon McQueen** defeated **Blanco Loco & Dream Girl Ellie** ... **Gustavo Aguilar** pinned **Myron Reed** ... KFW heavyweight champion **Brian Pillman Jr** defeated **Rob Killjoy**. (09-11-20)

—*Phillip Stamper*

## WEST VIRGINIA

**KEARNEYSVILLE**—Eastern Panhandle Pro Wrestling: Cruiserweight champion **Thomas Mathis** beat **Anton Nathan** ... Heavyweight champion **Cory Bush** defeated **Thomas Mathis** ... *Respect Championship Tournament, Quarterfinals*: **Eric Ecton** defeated **Mike Giron** ... **Chris Cline** beat **Van Hanson** ... **Sicend** beat **Izzy Stoned** ... **Black Hawk** defeated **Charles Everest Osgood** ... *Semi-Finals*: **Eric Ecton** defeated **Chris Cline** ... **Sicend** beat **Black Hawk** ... *Final*: **Eric Ecton** defeated **Sicend** to become the inaugural EPPW Respect champion. (09-12-20)

—*Daniel Watson*

## INTERNATIONAL

### ENGLAND

**LONDON**—RevPro Epic Encounters 2 at Portsmouth School of Wrestling: **Mark Haskins** beat **JJ Gale** ... **Brendan White** defeated **Kenneth Halfpenny** ... **Dan Moloney** defeated **Joel Redman** ... **Will Ospreay** beat **Callum Newman** ... **Bea Priestley & Jamie Hayter** defeated **Aleah James & Gisele Shaw** ... RevPro Undisputed British cruiserweight champion **Michael Oku** defeated SWE Speed King champion **Ricky Knight Jr.** to unify the titles. (09-13-20)

—*Leah Kowalski*

**LONDON**—RevPro Epic Encounters 1 at Portsmouth School of Wrestling: **Robbie X** defeated **Connor Mills** ... **Brendan White** beat **Kenneth Halfpenny** ... **Dan Moloney** defeated **Callum Newman** ... **Aleah James** beat **Bobby Tyler** ... **Kyle Fletcher & Ricky Knight Jr.** defeated **Michael Oku & Will Ospreay** ... Undisputed British Women's champion **Gisele Shaw** beat **Jamie Hayter**. (08-23-20)

—*Leah Kowalski*

### JAPAN

**TOKYO**—Sendai Girls' Pro Wrestling at Shin-Kiba 1<sup>st</sup> RING: **Honori Hana, Nanami, & Yurika Oka** beat **AKARI, Maria, & Natsuho Kaneko** ... **KAORU** defeated **Mei Hoshizuki** ... **Sakura Hirota** defeated **Manami** ... **DASH Chisako & Meiko Satomura** beat **Chihiro Hashimoto & Yuu**. (09-02-20)

—*Megan Thrash*

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Allie Kat connects with her signature "Laricat" on the much larger Slade before collecting the pinfall and having her hand raised in victory.



# THE WAY IT WAS

BY BRIAN SOLOMON

**B**EFORE HIM THERE was Dick Lane, legendary voice of Los Angeles wrestling on KTLA, who coined much of wrestling's common vernacular; after him, there was Jim Ross, the iconic man in the black Resistol hat, who embodied Mid-South Wrestling, WCW, and WWE for decades. But, for those lucky enough to grow up watching wrestling in the 1960s, 1970s, and early '80s, there was one unmistakable voice that stood above the rest, epitomizing all that true fans loved about the sport: the classic, gravelly, professorial wisdom of the dean of wrestling announcers, Gordon Solie.

Last July, we hit the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gordon's passing, which left behind a vacuum that can never truly be filled. Like Howard Cosell in boxing and football, or Vin Scully in baseball, Gordon Solie brought dignity and gravitas to professional wrestling—which, as any fan can tell you, is no easy task! In a business often characterized as either a circus or a soap opera, Gordon brought class to the proceedings, always calling it like he saw it and taking things seriously no matter what he was given to work with.

Before him, many wrestling announcers treated wrestling as a joke, winking at the audience every chance they got and never missing an opportunity to poke fun at the performers—almost as if they were embarrassed to be associated with it. Solie's brilliance was in

being the first to take a deadpan, sports-like approach to calling the action, describing holds and their effects in detail, portraying the talent not as clowns but as pro athletes worthy of respect. Although he never went in for the histrionics most wrestling announcers are known for, he brought a palpable degree of passion to his work, making you believe in the heated rivalries and the prestige of championships, because he spoke as though *he* believed in them. In the process, he set the standard expected of every great wrestling announcer since.

Solie was perhaps most known for his work at the desk of Championship Wrestling From Florida, where he anchored Eddie Graham's weekly TV show for more than a quarter-century. He

played a key role in helping talent get over, most notably an NCAA Division I wrestling champion from Oklahoma State named Jack Brisco, whom he helped elevate to one of the greatest competitors to ever hold what he called the "ten pounds of gold," the NWA World Heavyweight championship belt. And then there was the plumber's son from Austin, Texas, Dusty Rhodes, with whom Gordon developed a Cosell-Muhammad Ali type of relationship.

Gordon's work was so admired that when Jim Barnett took Georgia Championship Wrestling national on Superstation WTBS in the mid-1970s, he brought Gordon in as the show's lead announcer to add legitimacy. Gordon could then be seen on national cable TV, praising the abilities of Tommy



Given his no-nonsense approach to commentary, Gordon Solie found the perfect foil in the loudmouthed Roddy Piper. Piper's eventual heroic turn would be that much more memorable because he was defending his broadcast partner.





**Solie poses with his PWI Editor's Award (today called the "Stanley Weston Award") recognizing his lifetime of achievement in the field of pro wrestling.**

Rich and Mr. Wrestling II, and patiently contending with the heelish antics of The Assassins, Austin Idol, and a young Roddy Piper, with whom he formed wrestling's first good guy/bad guy announce team. (Old-school Georgia fans still remember Piper's memorable babyface turn, in which he saved Solie from an attack by Don Muraco.)

By the 1980s, Solie had also been brought on as the host of Southeastern Championship Wrestling, making him the voice of three different major promotions. On top of that, he would regularly be employed by other promoters to make their "supercards" even more special. At Crockett Promotions' inaugural Starrcade event in 1983, he joined commentator Bob Caudle in calling the

legendary cage match between Ric Flair and Harley Race.

A few years later, after most of the territories had gone out of business, Solie came to work full-time for Crockett. Later, in WCW, he crossed paths with Jim Ross, the man many consider his successor as wrestling's greatest announcer. Solie stayed with WCW until his retirement in 1995. Some believe his departure was due to his disapproval of the direction WCW was taking under the influence of Eric Bischoff and Hulk Hogan, but it may also have been due to health issues.

Fans were heartbroken when Solie, a lifelong heavy smoker, was diagnosed with throat cancer that led to the removal of his vocal cords, taking away the very thing for which he was beloved. Cancer

then spread to his brain, and took the life of the Walter Cronkite of professional wrestling on July 27, 2000. He was mourned by the legions of fans who owed their love of the sport in large part to him, and by those close to him, who knew him as a kind family man.

"His steady presence when all around him was chaos showed me how to handle similar situations when I became a professional wrestling announcer," recalls Kevin Kelly, the highly respected voice of NJPW and longtime ROH and WWE commentator. "I lived and died with Championship Wrestling From Florida and, later on, Georgia Championship Wrestling. It was because of Gordon Solie I became a fan, and I wanted to follow in his footsteps. While I followed his lead, I could never fill his shoes. He will have no equal, in my book."

Those fortunate enough to have heard Gordon Solie in his prime recall fondly his classic calls. Tough guys were "all man, and a yard wide," bleeding wrestlers were "wearing a crimson mask," the wildest melees became "Pier 6 brawls." And of course, with Solie, a suplex was always a "supplay." He's been recognized as an inductee to the WWE, WCW, NWA, Wrestling Observer, and Professional Wrestling Halls of Fame, a distinction enjoyed by no other wrestling commentator. For those whom cherished pro wrestling memories are narrated in his unforgettable voice, there's no question why.

There was one more catchphrase closely associated with Gordon Solie, which he used to close every installment of Championship Wrestling From Florida, and it seems suitable to repeat here just one more time.

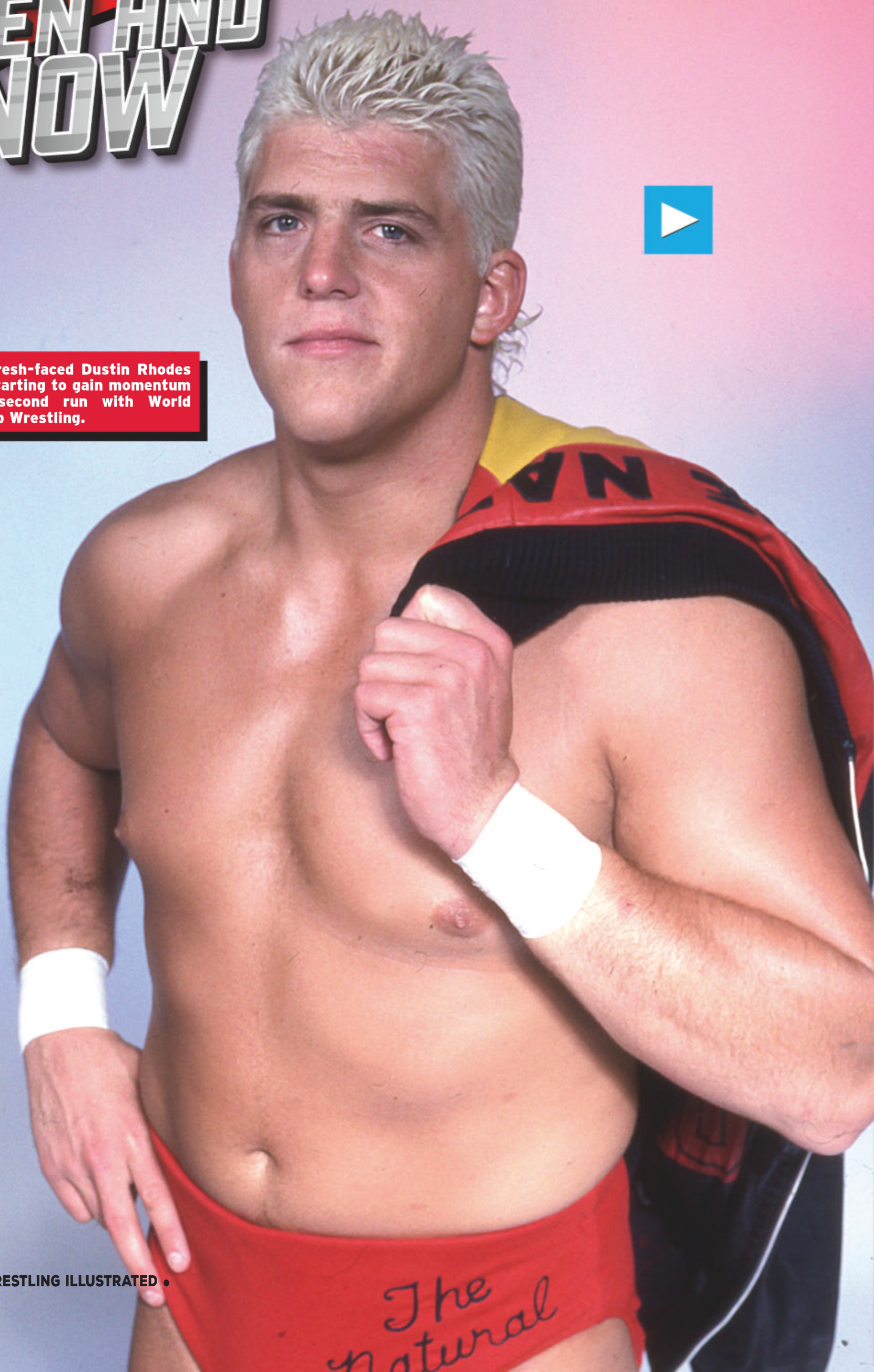
"So long, from the Sunshine State!" □



# THEN AND NOW



In 1993, a fresh-faced Dustin Rhodes was finally starting to gain momentum during his second run with World Championship Wrestling.







Today, "The Natural" might have a few more aches and pains, but he's in arguably the best shape of his life—as this September 2020 photo will attest.

PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

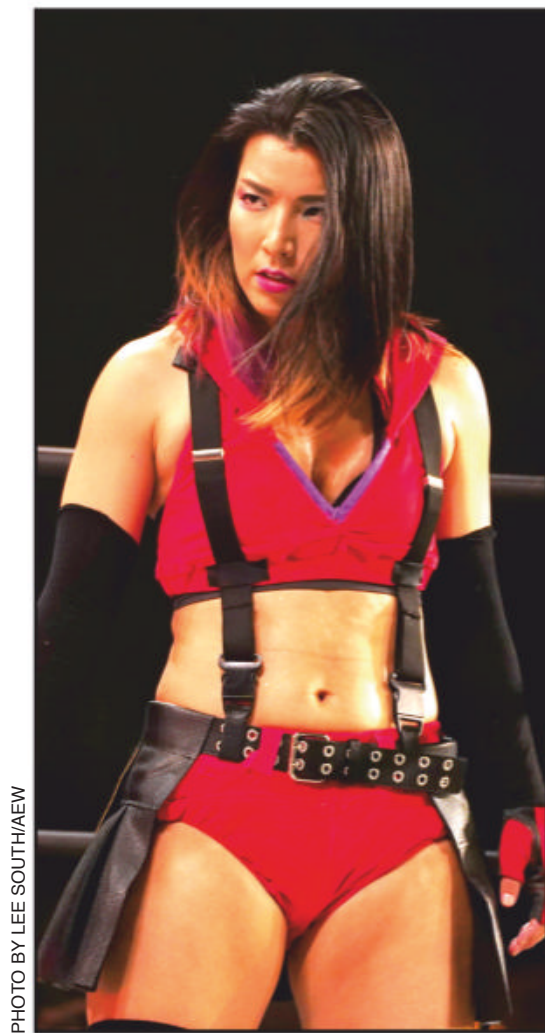


# PWI OFFICIAL RATINGS

FOR PERIOD ENDED  
SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

## HEAVYWEIGHT

- 1 JON MOXLEY**  
224, Cincinnati, OH  
(1) AEW World champion
- 2 DREW McINTYRE**  
265, Ayr, Scotland  
(2) WWE heavyweight champion
- 3 TETSUYA NAITO**  
225, Tokyo, Japan  
(4) IWGP World/Intercontinental champion
- 4 ROMAN REIGNS**  
265, Pensacola, FL  
(-) WWE Universal champion
- 5 FINN BALOR**  
190, Bray, Ireland  
(-) NXT heavyweight champion
- 6 RUSH**  
225, Jalisco, Mexico  
(6) ROH heavyweight champion
- 7 ERIC YOUNG**  
232, Florence, ON  
(-) Impact heavyweight champion
- 8 EITA**  
159, Nagano, Japan  
(-) Dragon Gate champion
- 9 BRODIE LEE**  
275, Rochester, NY  
(-) AEW TNT champion
- 10 BOBBY LASHLEY**  
273, Junction City, KS  
(-) WWE U.S. champion



HIKARU SHIDA

## WOMEN

- 1 BAYLEY**  
(2) 119, San Jose, CA  
Smackdown Women's champion
- 2 ASUKA**  
(3) 137, Osaka, Japan  
Raw Women's champion
- 3 IO SHIRAI**  
(4) 119, Kanagawa, Japan  
NXT Women's champion
- 4 HIKARU SHIDA**  
(4) 126, Kanagawa, Japan  
AEW Women's champion
- 5 THUNDER ROSA**  
(-) 132, Tijuana, Mexico  
NWA Women's champion
- 6 SASHA BANKS**  
(8) 115, Fairfield, CA
- 7 DEONNA PURRAZZO**  
(-) 145, Livingston, NJ  
Impact Knockouts champion
- 8 NIKKI CROSS**  
(10) 121, Glasgow, Scotland
- 9 DAKOTA KAI**  
(-) 121, Auckland, NZ  
No. 1 contender NXT Women's title
- 10 SHAYNA BASZLER**  
(-) 160, Sioux Falls, SD  
Women's tag team champion

## WWE RAW

WWE Champion:

- DREW McINTYRE**  
(C) 265, Ayr, Scotland
- 1—BOBBY LASHLEY**  
(5) 273, Colorado Springs, CO
  - 2—RANDY ORTON**  
(-) 250, St. Louis, MO
  - 3—SETH ROLLINS**  
(4) 227, Davenport, IA
  - 4—KEITH LEE**  
(-) 340, Wichita Falls, TX
  - 5—ALEISTER BLACK**  
(-) 215, Amsterdam, Holland
  - 6—DOMINIK MYSTERIO**  
(-) 200, San Diego, CA
  - 7—KEVIN OWENS**  
(3) 266, Marietta, GA
  - 8—APOLLO CREWS**  
(1) 240, Sacramento, CA
  - 9—CEDRIC ALEXANDER**  
(-) 205, Charlotte, NC
  - 10—SHELTON BENJAMIN**  
(-) 248, Orangeburg, SC

## SMACKDOWN

Universal Champion:

- ROMAN REIGNS**  
(-) 265, Pensacola, FL
- 1—BRAY WYATT**  
(4) 286, Brooksville, FL
  - 2—SAMI ZAYN**  
(-) 212, Montreal, QC
  - 3—BRAUN STROWMAN**  
(C) 386, Sherrills Ford, NC
  - 4—OTIS**  
(1) 311, Duluth, MN
  - 5—AJ STYLES**  
(7) 218, Gainesville, GA
  - 6—JEY USO**  
(-) 227, San Francisco, CA
  - 7—BIG E**  
(9) 285, Tampa, FL
  - 8—SHEAMUS**  
(6) 267, Dublin, Ireland
  - 9—CESARO**  
(10) 232, Lucerne, Switzerland
  - 10—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA**  
(-) 229, Kyoto, Japan

## AEW

World Heavyweight Champion:

- JON MOXLEY**  
(C) 224, Cincinnati, OH
- 1—BRODIE LEE**  
(4) 275, Rochester, NY
  - 2—LANCE ARCHER**  
(7) 265, Gause, TX
  - 3—MJF**  
(2) 216, Plainview, NY
  - 4—ORANGE CASSIDY**  
(-) 180, Stewartville, NJ
  - 5—EDDIE KINGSTON**  
(-) 240, Yonkers, NY
  - 6—CHRIS JERICHO**  
(6) 227, Winnipeg, MB
  - 7—SCORPIO SKY**  
(-) 205, Los Angeles, CA
  - 8—ADAM PAGE**  
(-) 228, Aaron's Creek, VA
  - 9—CODY RHODES**  
(1) 220, Atlanta, GA
  - 10—KENNY OMEGA**  
(5) 229, Winnipeg, MB

## IMPACT

Heavyweight Champion:

- ERIC YOUNG**  
(-) 232, Florence, ON
- 1—ROHIT RAJU**  
(-) 172, Saginaw, MI
  - 2—MOOSE**  
(2) 295, Atlanta, GA
  - 3—RICH SWANN**  
(-) 200, Baltimore, MD
  - 4—TREY MIGUEL**  
(4) 172, Toledo, OH
  - 5—CHRIS BEY**  
(8) 180, Alexandria, VA
  - 6—BRIAN MYERS**  
(-) 223, Glen Cove, NY
  - 7—WILLIE MACK**  
(1) 280, Los Angeles, CA
  - 8—SAMI CALLIHAN**  
(6) 207, Bellefontaine, OH
  - 9—TJP**  
(-) 167, Kansas City, MO
  - 10—ACE AUSTIN**  
(3) 190, Atlantic City, NJ



Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or tag team. These ratings are compiled by a committee consisting of Kevin McElvaney, Pat Laprade, Kris Zellner, Louie Dee, Harry Burkett, and STRIGGA (cagematch.net, purolove.com). The numbers in parenthesis indicate a wrestler's position in that category last issue. If you're a promoter wishing to make a submission to the agate-sized ratings, email us at pwireresults@yahoo.com (please put the word "ratings" in the subject line).

TAG TEAMS

- 1

**MONTEZ FORD & ANGELO DAWKINS**  
Combined weight: 492 pounds  
(3) Raw tag team champions
- 2

**DAX HARWOOD & CASH WHEELER**  
Combined Weight: 446 pounds  
(-) AEW World tag team champions
- 3

**CHRIS SABIN & ALEX SHELLEY**  
Combined weight: 420 pounds  
(-) Impact Wrestling tag team champions
- 4

**CESARO & SHINSUKE NAKAMURA**  
Combined weight: 461 pounds  
(-) Smackdown tag team champions
- 5

**ZACK SABRE JR. & TAICHI**  
Combined weight: 428 pounds  
(-) IWGP World tag team champions
- 6

**NIA JAX & SHAYNA BASZLER**  
Combined weight: 422 pounds  
(-) WWE Women's tag team champions
- 7

**FANDANGO & TYLER BREEZE**  
Combined weight: 450 pounds  
(-) NXT tag team champions
- 8

**SUWAMA & SHUJI ISHIKAWA**  
Combined weight: 552 pounds  
(8) All Japan tag team champions
- 9

**JAY LETHAL & JONATHAN GRESHAM**  
Combined weight: 400 pounds  
(6) ROH tag team champions
- 10

**RUBY RIOTT & LIV MORGAN**  
Combined weight: 239 pounds  
(-) No. 1 contenders Women's tag title

**COASTAL ATLANTIC GRAPPLING GROUP: CHAMPION**—VACANT; 1—Ryan Riley; 2—Cruze Brittle; 3—Eric Gibson; 4—Nathan Cross; 5—Ethan Storm; 6—Sammy Love; 7—Wachee; 8—Phil De Carlo; 9—Tazz Jackson; 10—Side Effect

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: CHAMPION**—Joey Ace; 1—Eric Martin; 2—Mike Law; 3—Sam Shields; 4—Mr. Ooh La-La; 5—Greg Spitz; 6—Teddy Fine; 7—Jay D. Luscious; 8—Chris Rockwell; 9—A Very Good Professional Wrestler; 10—Travis Lee

**FIGHT CLUB PRO WRESTLING: CHAMPION**—Trish Adora; 1—Billy Dixon; 2—O'Shay Edwards; 3—Mr. Grim; 4—Killian McMurphy; 5—Darius Lockhart; 6—Christopher Andino; 7—Kristian Robinson; 8—Ashton Starr; 9—DK Meadows; 10—Eel O'Neal

**MAJOR LEAGUE WRESTLING: CHAMPION**—Jacob Fatu; 1—Alexander Hammerstone; 2—Davey Boy Smith Jr.; 3—Myron Reed; 4—Brian Pillman Jr.; 5—Tom Lawlor; 6— Richard Holliday; 7—King Mo; 8—Mance Warner; 9—Low Ki; 10—Dominic Garrini

**MEXICO:** 1—Volador Jr.; 2—Felino; 3—Gran Guerrero; 4—El Bandido; 5—Dr. Wagner Jr.; 6—Dragon Bane; 7—El Bandido; 8—Soberano Jr.; 9—Flyer; 10—Tiger

**NEW FOCUS WRESTLING: CHAMPION**—Josh Lewis; 1—Scotty Wolf; 2—Rob Conway; 3—Flash Flanagan; 4—Vic The Bruiser; 5—Chase Stevens; 6—Xander Kelly; 7—Benny Bray; 8—Canadian Kid; 9—Khloe Richards; 10—J-Rocc Daddy

**NXT U.K.: CHAMPION**—WALTER; 1—Ilja Dragunov; 2— Noam Dar; 3—Trent Seven; 4—Alexander Wolfe; 5—Wolfgang; 6—Joseph Conners; 7—Dave Mastiff; 8—Flash Morgan Webster; 9—A-Kid; 10—Amir Jordan

**PRO WRESTLING NOAH: CHAMPION**—Go Shiozaki; 1—Kenou; 2—Takashi Sugiura; 3—Katsuhiko Nakajima; 4—Kotaro Suzuki; 5—Naomichi Marufuji; 6—Kazushi Sakuraba; 7—Kaito Kiyomiya; 8—Masaaki Mochizuki; 9—Seiki Yoshioka; 10—Hayata

**REAL CANADIAN WRESTLING: CHAMPION**—Steve Rivers; 1—Heavy Metal; 2—KB6; 3—Dwight D. Davis; 4—Steve Wilde; 5—Vince Austin; 6—Matt Hart; 7—KOTA; 8—Shaun Martins; 9—Slammer; 10—Nate Nixon

**SUPREME WRESTLING: CHAMPION**—Angus Barnett 1—Josh Lewis; 2—Kash Jackson; 3—Nic Noble; 4—Roger Malcolm; 5—Leon Elliot; 6—Chuck McRoberts; 7—Billy Mattern; 8—Bailey McRoberts; 9—Gaston LaRue; 10—Chet Rippley

ROH

Heavyweight Champion:  
**RUSH**  
(C) 225, Jalisco, Mexico  
1—**PCO**  
(1) 300, Montreal, QC  
2—**DRAGON LEE**  
(2) 165, Jalisco, Mexico  
3—**JONATHAN GRESHAM**  
(-) 161, Atlanta, GA  
4—**JAY LETHAL**  
(-) 225, Elizabeth, NJ  
5—**MATT SYDAL**  
(-) 185, St. Louis, MO  
6—**JOSH WOODS**  
(-) 233, Dallas, TX  
7—**FRED YEHI**  
(-) 207, Atlanta, GA  
8—**DAVID FINLAY**  
(-) 209, Atlanta, GA  
9—**TRACY WILLIAMS**  
(-) 195, Brooklyn, NY  
10—**PJ BLACK**  
(-) 213, Cape Town

NXT

Heavyweight Champion:  
**FINN BALOR**  
(2) 190, Bray, Ireland  
1—**DAMIAN PRIEST**  
(1) 248, New York, NY  
2—**ADAM COLE**  
(C) 210, Panama City, FL  
3—**JOHNNY GARGANO**  
(3) 199, Cleveland, OH  
4—**BRONSON REED**  
(-) 330, Adelaide, Australia  
5—**TOMMASO CIAMPA**  
(5) 201, Milwaukee, WI  
6—**SANTOS ESCOBAR**  
(6) 198, Mexico City, Mexico  
7—**CAMERON GRIMES**  
(9) 220, Cameron, NC  
8—**TIMOTHY THATCHER**  
(10) 228, Sacramento, CA  
9—**KYLE O'REILLY**  
(-) 200, Delta, BC  
10—**VELVETEEN DREAM**  
(4) 227, Washington, DC

NEW JAPAN

IWGP World Champion:  
**TETSUYA NAITO**  
(C) 225, Tokyo, Japan  
1—**EVIL**  
(-) 234, Mishima, Japan  
2—**MINORU SUZUKI**  
(10) 225, Yokohama, Japan  
3—**TAIJI ISHIMORI**  
(-) 165, Tagajo, Japan  
4—**HIROMU TAKAHASHI**  
(4) 194, Tokyo, Japan  
5—**KAZUCHIKA OKADA**  
(2) 236, Tokyo, Japan  
6—**SHINGO TAKAGI**  
(1) 212, Yamanashi, Japan  
7—**TORU YANO**  
(-) 253, Tokyo, Japan  
8—**KOTA IBUSHI**  
(-) 205, Kagoshima, Japan  
9—**ZACK SABRE JR.**  
(7) 187, London, England  
10—**EL DESPERADO**  
(-) 198, Nagaoka, Japan

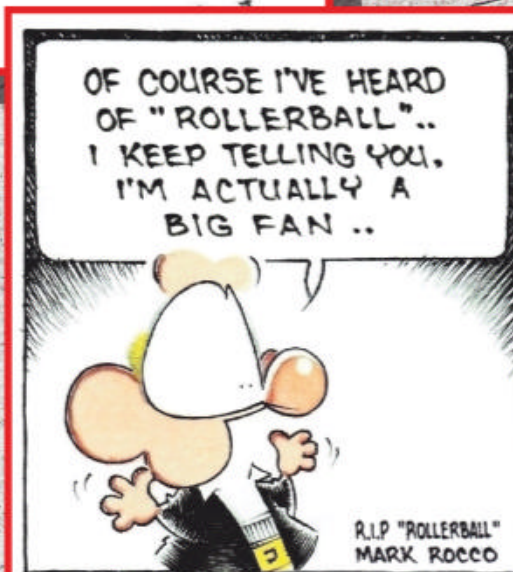
GCW

Heavyweight Champion:  
**RICKEY SHANE PAGE**  
(-) 282, Lordstown, OH  
1—**ALEX COLON**  
(-) 189, Hammonton, NJ  
2—**CHRIS DICKINSON**  
(-) 235, Staten Island, NY  
3—**JOEY JANELA**  
(-) 183, Asbury Park, NJ  
4—**AJ GRAY**  
(-) 240, Lexington, TN  
5—**ACH**  
(-) 185, Austin, TX  
6—**BLAKE CHRISTIAN**  
(-) 180, Jackson, TN  
7—**ALLIE KAT**  
(-) 128, Austin, TX  
8—**LEE MORIARTY**  
(-) 185, Pittsburgh, PA  
9—**MANCE WARNER**  
(-) 215, Bucksnot, TN  
10—**TONY DEPPEN**  
(-) 165, Shamokin, PA



# DRAWING BLOOD

BY JASON CONLAN







# THE PWI PODCAST

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